BETSY HALE TRIES

"It's the Same Flag, Whether It's Large or Small"

BETSY HALE TRIES

By
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ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

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Betsy Hale Tries

CHAPTER I

The Circus Parade

"OH, Betsy, we're just in time, I do believe!" said Selma, pulling at the reins with excited hands. "Oh, Dolly, *do* get on, or we'll miss it yet!"

Betsy strained her eyes ahead to the trolley tracks and telegraph poles of Main Street.

"It must be coming," she said with a kindling face. "Everybody's ready and waiting. What a lot of people for Highville!"

Selma jerked the old horse into a quicker amble. "Dolly's such a poke," she murmured, staring ahead, too. Her cheeks were pink and she was unusually animated.

Betsy sat up very straight and kept her blue eyes steadily on the spot ahead where Main Street, with its four important corners, made the center of the little town.

"It must be coming," she repeated, and she clasped her hands tightly in her lap and pressed her feet hard on the velvet mat in the bottom of the buggy. Dolly was very slow indeed at that moment.

The wide, shady side-street there was very empty. Dolly's leisurely "clip-clop, clip-clop" was the only sound that broke the sunny silence. The smell of freshly sprinkled flower beds was in the air, but no one was to be seen in the pretty gardens or on the trim sidewalks. All the stir and bustle of the pleasant June morning in the pleasant little town was gathered just ahead on Main Street, along the pavements of the hardware store, by the post office and on the drug store corner.

As the buggy drew nearer, there was a sudden knotting together of the loosely scattered groups into a closer line, and all heads turned toward the lower unseen end of Main Street where the trolley tracks and telegraph poles turned the sudden corner by the mill.

"It must be coming," said Betsy for the third time. Her voice was thrilling with expectancy and she stirred lightly on the seat like a bird ready to fly.

A scurry of belated children passed them as Dolly came to a halt by the side of the drug store. All of them were craning toward the same direction, and Betsy's eyes followed theirs.

"We can see finely from here," she began. "We're so high up in the buggy, too. It's——"

"What in the world!" Selma broke in on her with a flurry of surprise. She began pulling at Dolly's rein again.

Mr. Tibbins, Highville's one policeman, was approaching them with one hand raised high.

"He's waving to us," exclaimed Betsy under her breath.

Mr. Tibbins wore his uniform and his hand was raised in authority. He was very magnificent. It was only on Saturday nights and other high occasions that the town permitted its guardian to don this dreadful panoply of the law, and Mr. Tibbins knew well the effect of that uniform. In it he was a different man than in the everyday, easy-going black suit.

So it was, with his chest inflated and one

hand upraised, that he came toward them. His voice rolled out compellingly:

"No parking within one hundred yards of the display!" he declaimed, waving them backwards with great dignity, and with great relish, too.

Betsy, rather abashed, shot a glance at Selma. It was not a time for words.

Selma's soft lips were set in a firm line, and her hands were firm, too. Without a word she began to back Dolly out of the range of that official hand, keeping her eyes on the warning Mr. Tibbins while she skilfully steered the buggy in its withdrawal.

Dolly was willing enough, and back they went, slowly and steadily, past the news-stand, past the harness-maker's, past the barber shop on the alley. Betsy began to think they were to back entirely out of town, when a final wave of the inexorable hand sent them around the corner into the alley, with Dolly's quivering nose touching the gayly striped pole on the corner of the curbing; and then Mr. Tibbins, satisfied with the performance of his duty, went back to the line of people on Main Street.

Selma's mouth was tighter than ever as she groped for the hitching strap.

"I declare!" she said tensely. "That Mr. Tibbins just wants to show himself. There isn't another wagon on the whole of Elm Avenue and we couldn't have been in anybody's way. I've a good mind to ask him why we couldn't stay in the buggy. We could see lots better——"

"Don't let's bother," broke in Betsy, good naturedly. "It will be more fun to be among the rest of the people, anyway. Come along. We'll be late if we aren't sharp."

Selma, whose ideas were apt to be deeply rooted, did not go without a protest. "But we wouldn't have been in anybody's way," she insisted, as she tied Dolly to the post. "Mr. Tibbins just wants to show himself, because he's got his uniform on."

Betsy laughed indulgently. Selma often took stands that did not appeal to her common sense. "I suppose he's only doing what he has to do," she said easily. Her eyes were busy with the lines of people on the Main Street sidewalks. "There's a reason, no doubt. Oh, hark, there's a horn! Hurry!"

They were in front of the drug store before they knew it, and quickly found a good opening among the loosely scattered groups. Betsy balanced on the very edge of the curbing and she clutched Selma's hand hard.

"It's coming! Oh, it's coming!" she breathed.

There was not a shadow of a doubt about it now. It was coming, as Betsy had so repeatedly said.

"Toot, toot!"

Around the corner of the street she caught what she was straining her eyes for—the very first view of the very first part of the circus parade. She was on tip-toe, while Selma, who had seen such things many times before, was more composed in her enjoyment.

"Toot, toot, TOOT!"

It was a small beginning. The very tiniest possible clown on the very tiniest possible donkey was blowing away for dear life on the very largest possible horn. When he pulled the shining lengths of brass out for that last loud note, it almost unbalanced him.

"Oh, isn't he cute?" said Selma. "And what lovely furry ears he has."

Betsy, whose eyes were on the tiny clown,

laughed out a merry ripple, but she was too eager for words. She liked the little donkey, but human beings always took her first int rest. "He's a dear," she said under her breath.

The tiny rider came all alone, riding his little steed between the lines of waiting people, blowing note after note from the big horn as valiantly as any herald of old before some ancient fortress. And he did not blow in vain. How the people laughed and clapped! They were ready for anything, and each toot of the big horn brought a fresh round of applause, until a sudden clatter of many hoofs, a great crackling of whips and a rumble of wheels turned their eyes back to the crook of the street again.

Here it was, glittering with gold scroll-work and flaming vermilion from top to rim, with a half-dozen funny figures in flaring neckties and ridiculous coats, bright daubs of color on their white-painted faces, and a medley of instruments in their hands. Selma nodded as it appeared. "It's the band-wagon," she told the less experienced Betsy. "They'll play when they get a bit nearer."

And so they did. When the first edge had died from the applause, and they had reached the level street, they put their glittering instruments to use, and they began to play. That was music to make a very cripple march. The boys took up the rhythm and beat it out upon the fire-plug and the awning posts—"Rumpty-tumpty-tum"—as the wagon passed with its short burst of flaring melody. The white-faced young man with the green necktie threw a kiss to the group of teachers from the Seminary as he passed, and there was a great deal of subdued snickering and giggling among the school children.

A crash of cymbals blotted out the laughter.

"Another clown!" said Betsy in surprise. "Oh, I wish the cymbals would stop so I could hear what he is saying!"

But nobody could hear what the tall clown on the big gray mule was joking about. They all laughed just the same, for they knew by the glint of his eye and the twist of his funny red mouth that he was a first-rate one in his line. His big mule carried him off while Betsy was still straining to hear his jokes, and the little procession of cowgirls

was riding past before she was ready for them. Selma whispered that they were dreadfully tanned, but Betsy liked their steady eyes and business-like air.

The cowboys were not so serious. They came two by two, like the others, but they looked about a good bit. The one with the rose in his hat bowed and smiled all along the line. "He must be the leader," Selma hazarded. "But do look at that other one in the black shirt. How he stares ahead. He's very dark and romantic, I think. He must have a past."

Betsy did not stop to consider this. Everything moved too fast. The man was certainly dark and gloomy looking. It was rather thrilling to explain his set look in this fashion. The look on his face stayed within her mind after the cavalcade had swept by.

Next came a whiff of stuffy, fluffy, furry wild odor. A great barred cage with the label *Grave Digging Hyena* on it in big letters and a restless figure inside rolled slowly along, leaving little shivers behind it.

"I hope it can't get out," said Betsy with a little laugh. "It would be so horrid to wake up and see it sitting by your bed——"

Selma's little squeal of horror stopped her. "Of course, none of the animals ever get loose," she added hastily. "I was only joking."

Selma looked a little disturbed. She did not dismiss subjects so easily as the nimbler-witted Betsy. She would have spoken if another gay wagon had not claimed her attention. "It's the bareback riders," she told Betsy. "They wore those spangled riding suits on the posters, don't you remember?"

Betsy did remember, and she looked with all her eyes. Of all the feats that had won her admiration on poster or bill-board, the bareback riders' had been the most alluring. To poise on the tips of one's toes on the angle of a neck or tail of a dashing steed had seemed to her the height of dextrous courage, and she drew a long breath as the lumbering big wagon, all scroll-work and blue and gold, came nearer.

"Oh!" said Betsy, and the long breath turned to a sigh of disappointment, for the sturdy figures, the square-jawed, determined faces under the plentiful rolls of light hair

did not look in the least like the smiling sylphs of the posters. They looked rather tired, as they sat there chatting together, indifferent of the lines of people on either side of their chariot.

"I never thought they'd look like that," she confessed to Selma, who was too intent on the next car to pay attention.

Another whiff of the wild smell. A lioness with head hung low and feet padding softly, was pacing the length of her cage, her tail switching and her eyes shooting side glances at the tempting row of faces which her bars denied her craving. Selma looked at the bars.

"They're pretty thick," she commented comfortably.

"You bet they are," said an understanding voice. "She couldn't get out in a month of Sundays. Gee, I'd like to be her keeper! That's some job, I bet."

Selma turned a severe face on Jimmy Delaney. She spoke with calm conviction. "You can't be an animal keeper unless you've lived in the jungle and trapped and tamed them. I've read all about it in the Geography magazine."

Jimmy was gone, wriggling through the people to another spot, but Selma finished impressively. "You've got to study them in their lairs." The phrase seemed to give her great satisfaction.

Betsy was only vaguely interested. "Jimmy always was crazy about animals," she said indifferently, watching the camels go by with their sneering, superior look.

Selma was prepared to go further, but instead she said, "Oh, how cute!" while Betsy cried, "Oh, poor things!"

They both meant the same cage, but Selma was looking at the little terrier and Betsy had her eyes on the big, tired brown bear. The terrier yapped incessantly from his corner of the cage, while the bear paced back and forth, back and forth, oblivious of the crowds, lost in some dream of the free forest and mountainside.

Philip Meade had just spied them and came over to where they stood. She turned to him with pity in her forget-me-not blue eyes. "It's a shame to keep him cooped up like that," she said vigorously. "He looks tired to death and as gentle as can be——"

"Oh, Betsy!" cried Selma. "How you do talk! Those horrid wild animals have to be cooped up, or they'd go around biting and tearing everybody they met."

Philip chuckled at her warmth. "He looks as though he'd like a little exercise. Maybe they'll let you take him a walk after the show's over."

Betsy defended herself, though she laughed, too. "I don't believe he'd hurt anybody. They wouldn't put the dog in with him if he was so fierce. I shouldn't be a bit afraid of him."

" 'Brag is a good dog, but Holdfast is a better,' " quoted Philip with a twinkle. "I'd rather see you first."

A flutter of small hand-bills cut the argument short. The manager and his family in Roman costume, bowing and kissing their finger-tips in true circus fashion, were showering the bystanders with pink paper descriptions of the delights that were in store for those fortunate enough to be able to enjoy them. There were to be four performances on the two day's stay.

"I'm going to everyone of them if I can," Philip declared. "I——"

A trumpeter in faded green and gold was bawling an announcement through a gilded megaphone.

"India's tribute to the Western World! The Matchless Mastodon of the Maharajahs! The elephants, ladies and gentlemen, the elephants!"

It was tremendous to hear them announced. People pricked up their ears and pressed closer, stirred by the vibrating tones. The elephants had a better reception than if they had come unheralded.

The two big dusky brutes heaved slowly along, their gray sides drooping and their trunks swinging. On the forehead of each sat a man with folded arms and crossed feet, wearing a little cap and a uniform with many buttons. He sat stark and immovable and carried a great elephant goad under one arm.

Selma was disappointed in the drivers. "They look like the bell-boys in the city hotels," she complained. "They ought to wear turbans and things."

Philip chuckled with admiration. "Talk about rubber heels!" he said approvingly. "Look at those fellows. They keep their

gum boots on all the time. Just hear them scuff!"

"They're pretty thin," Betsy could not help saying. "And I think they look sad, too."

Philip flashed a teasing glance at her. "Golly but you're tender-hearted this morning," he laughed. "What's the matter with——"

Betsy gave a gasp. Selma gave a little squeal and Philip made an involuntary start forward.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Tibbins, throwing up his official hand.

All eyes were turned to the place his voice sounded, and in an instant all was confusion.

The man on the second elephant had suddenly lurched forward, dropping something that flashed as it fell. With the sway of his lurching figure, the big beast turned and swung suddenly about, turning the corner into Elm Avenue with his slow, swinging tread, while the people melted before him like magic, the women screaming and the boys yelling, and the men shouting commands, as they all pressed back to make a path for the great gray scuffing feet.

Selma screamed with the rest, when the sway of the frightened crowd pushed her back against the awning pole at the corner, but Betsy kept her lips tight and held on with both of her slim, strong hands when the retreating people shoved and pushed. Philip put out an arm to ward off the pressure from them both, and though he strained his eyes toward the center of the confusion, he did not desert them.

"Stop!" thundered Mr. Tibbins, from the shelter of the news-stand, where he had found refuge. "Stop, I say, you there!"

The elephant merely swung his trunk and made straight for the quaking guardian of the peace, while the people tumbled headlong out of his path. The sinuous, gray, snaky trunk had just touched the news-stand, and Mr. Tibbins was preparing for his last effort, when a ringing command from behind brought the elephant to a sudden halt.

It all happened in a second, and when the first elephant driver, turning quickly out of the procession, brought the runaway to a halt, the man on his back had recovered somewhat and was groping confusedly for his

goad. Betsy saw a flash of shining steel and a grimy paw held up near the driver's listless hand. Philip's voice sounded rather disappointed. "Jimmy's giving him the ankus, so it's all right," he said, reassuring them. "Golly, I'd like to have seen what old Tibbins would have done next, though."

The driver sat for a moment, staring about in dazed fashion. Mr. Tibbins came out of his retreat, and the screams of the excited crowd were hushed. A murmur and a ripple of agitated laughter ran about. The elephant stood very quiet, swaying contentedly, seeming well enough pleased with the quiet side street. The lull was as sudden as the commotion had been, and voices could be heard very plainly. People were recovering from the shock of fright, and they began to justify their terror by indignant comment.

A woman in a prim hat and severe face was clearly heard. "How disgusting!" she said sharply. "Intoxicated on the public highway. A fine advertisement for their paltry show, indeed!" A cheery individual with a double-chin laughed comfortably. "Don't be too hard on the pore feller, lady. You don't

know his temptations like us fellers do. See, he's settin' up and takin' notice. Think the best of him, do." Other voices could be heard complaining of the laxity of the authorities that suffered such accidents. Mr. Tibbins' name was plain enough in that quarter. But nobody listened, for the man, responding to the shouts of the other driver, had turned his elephant and was making his way back to the procession, which had considerately waited for him. The band, which had plunged humorously into "Where is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" struck gaily into "Hail to the Chief" as he drew near.

When he had swung into line again, he turned to the crowds on the drug store corner through which he had twice made his unexpected progress.

"Salaam!" he cried, in a curiously muffled voice. "Salaam!"

And so he passed out of sight with the others and the people all drew a long breath of relief to see him pass once again erect and with folded arms and crossed feet, albeit with a waving sense of importance about him that drew their eyes still with him as far as he could be seen.

"Well, he didn't *quite* squash us," said Selma gratefully. "I expected him to tread on us next——"

A shriek of escaping steam caught away her words of thanksgiving. There was a rumble of heavy wheels, and a sight of a gay tangle of pipes beneath a canopy of fluttering stripes. The steam calliope burst forth with preliminary groans and gurgles, and then flung its whole energy into the strains of the "Star Spangled Banner."

"Gracious, it's all over," said Selma.

Betsy drew a long breath. "So it is," she agreed regretfully.

"It was mighty short, wasn't it?" commented Philip. "I never saw a shorter one."

"But it was perfectly lovely while it lasted," Betsy protested loyally. "And that's what counts. I'd rather be happy for a minute than just drool on for an hour."

"Well, it's over," repeated Selma calmly, "and now we must see to getting home. I hope Dolly didn't break loose and make off when that elephant was on the rampage."

She stopped to throw a queer look at Betsy, as the crowd began to move.

"Mr. Tibbins wasn't too fussy about our buggy, after all," she said with a little gurgling laugh. "That elephant would have scared Dolly into fits, I guess."

CHAPTER II

The Call of the Flag

IT was astonishing how quickly the crowds melted away.

The empty space at the tail of the procession was instantly filled with a jostling throng of boys, among the first of whom Betsy caught a glimpse of Jimmy Delaney's plaid cap, while Philip's gray norfolk showed not far behind. All the noise and bustle went after the circus parade and Main Street became its everyday, humdrum self again. Even Mr. Tibbins had disappeared and the shady side street was almost deserted when the two girls hurried toward the retired spot where they had left the team.

"She's all right," said Betsy in some relief, slackening her pace at the sight of Dolly dozing placidly in the alley with her nose resting cosily against the gay pole. "She hasn't budged a step."

Selma untied the strap and got into the

buggy. She was still smiling her quiet little smile. "She wouldn't have had such a nice nap if she'd been up there by the drug store," she said, as she took up the reins. "I'm glad Mr. Tibbins did want to show himself," and she laughed her gurgling ripple. It was one of her chief charms for Betsy that she could usually see the joke on herself.

"It was a pretty good parade for this town," she went on, having disposed of the subject. "Sometimes they're fearfully small —though this wasn't very big either. I don't see why they get the circus here every year and we never have one. Our town hasn't nearly so many houses, but it's twice as old, and it has a high school, and three churches and the best library anywhere around. And there'd be just as many people come to the shows, because lots of our farmers and all of our town go to Highville every blessed time the circus comes there."

Betsy thought it would be delightful to have the fascinations of the circus within such easy reach, though she was not so deeply stirred with the sense of neglect as was Selma, whose father was the squire of the little settle-

ment. Besides, the memory of the elephant driver's face was troubling her.

"He was very pale when he dropped the ankus," she said thoughtfully. "Do you think he could have been—what that woman said?"

There was a thrill of distaste in her clear voice and a pucker of distress came between her brows. Selma, however, was too much interested in the wrongs of her native place to be much concerned. "I don't know," she replied. "He was very wobbly. But Highville always has something queer going on. They have lots of strangers, and they aren't at all careful. That's why they have Mr. Tibbins, I guess. We wouldn't have to get a policeman for our town if it was twice as big.

They had left the streets and were out on the open road. Betsy was gazing out over the blue line of distant hills. She sighed and gave it up. She knew that Selma would finish her own line of thought to her own liking, so she looked at the blue hills and waited.

"But Highville is so pushing," Selma went on. "Father says that they'd have us taken

off the map if they could. They know we've got a better school and library than they have, but they keep bragging about themselves just the same. They'll have the hospital next, I suppose. They're such a pushing lot."

Betsy was not interested in hospitals and the idea of one in the pretty, healthy village seemed quite out of place. "I don't see why you'd want such a thing," she said rather warmly. "I think it would be horrid. And there wouldn't be anyone to go into it. Everybody here is perfectly healthy. This air won't let them be sick, if they want to."

Selma had too lately come from Highville to confess any sort of lack in her native place. "You never know till you try," she said crisply. "We'd have plenty of people to go into it. Doctor's always taking someone to town to be operated on, and there would be all of the Highville people, if we got it first."

Betsy giggled at this display of loyalty in such a gruesome cause. Her own thoughts turned more naturally to welfare work, or to educational clubs, having seen and heard

much more of such projects in her past life in the city.

Selma's warmth was not lessened by the giggle. "You just wait and see," she counseled. "You'll find there are plenty of people who'd go into our hospital right spang off if we had one."

"Why don't you have one then, if you're so anxious about it?" laughed Betsy.

Selma's face lengthened. "Doctor is always trying to get people interested," she explained. "But somehow they won't get together. Highville will have it first, you may depend."

Betsy was beginning to be interested now, but Selma, with a flick of the whip against Dolly's impervious side, abruptly dropped the matter. She went back to Jimmy Delaney. "He can never be an animal trainer—never in the world," she said more placidly. "You have to study them in their lairs, you know."

Betsy's mind was busy with the memory of the doctor's kindness to them in her mother's returning health. "I wish he could get what he wants," she said, half aloud. "He's so kind and nice."

Selma looked slightly surprised and slightly contemptuous. "I don't think Jimmy's reformed enough to hurt him," she returned. "But no matter how good he is, he needn't think he can poke himself in among wild animals like that. He has to see them in their lairs."

Betsy explained that she was speaking of the doctor. Selma nodded and went on comfortably: "Oh, I guess he'll get his hospital sometime and somewhere. But Mrs. Delaney will never let Jimmy go to Africa or Asia, even if he had the money, and by the time he's of age he'll be too old to want to go." Selma was strong on legal matters, since her father was the squire and dealt out justice to the countryside.

"That man looked very funny," she said, taking up Betsy's question about the elephant driver. "Something was queer with him, for he put his hand on his stomach and grunted when the elephant stopped on Elm Avenue. Perhaps he has indigestion, like old Amos Atkinson. He died of it, you know."

Betsy moved uneasily. "We'll see them all again at the circus tomorrow afternoon, any-

way," she said, not enjoying the darker picture that Selma presented to her imagination. "It's perfectly lovely to be going with Emma Clara, isn't it. She's so sweet and—and—*understanding*, you know."

Selma nodded. She took things more as a matter of course. "I'm glad your mother will let you go," she said, turning Dolly's head into the back road toward home. "She might have thought it silly—being such a small circus, you see, and she being a writer now."

Betsy laughed." She always liked me to see animals," she told Selma. "I used to go to the Zoo with father when I was a little mite. She wanted to go, but she was too busy. She was always a writer, even then."

"Ah, yes, but not a novel writer like she's got to be now," protested Selma calmly. "She wrote those dry things that nobody except teachers and those people ever read. Now she's going to have a real novel in our library, and that's quite different."

Betsy felt so much uplifted over the success that seemed to be on the way to her beloved mother that she did not argue the point.

They chattered of the delights of the tan-bark rings and the bareback riders as they jogged along the sunny roadway. The birds were singing all about them and the blue leaf shadows were dancing across their path, while the hum and fragrance of early summer wove a palpitating glamor over the lovely landscape. Betsy drew a long breath as she lifted her face to the radiant sky.

"It's going to be a lovely day tomorrow," she prophesied joyfully. "We'll have a perfect time."

Selma agreed absently. Her eyes were on the little white cottage on the nearby hillside. Mrs. Delaney's sturdy figure stood in the doorway, waving a cheery greeting. Selma seemed to rejoice in the sight of her.

"There's no nonsense about her," she declared. "She'll have no horrid elephants or grave-digging hyenas in her backyard."

Betsy laughed as she looked back at the tiny cottage with its tiny outbuildings. "They'd have to fold the giraffe up tight to get him in the washhouse," she said. "And the elephant would have to kneel down to fit into the shed."

They were joking over the problem of accommodating the lioness or the camel, when their wheels rumbled on the bridge, where the rippling stream was already dropping to its summer level. Betsy's eyes slipped from the hillside to the shadows beneath the elms. A figure was sitting on the parapet there, where she had sat that chilly morning so long ago, and a yellow suitcase stood among the tufts of grass in the shade beside it, with a name in large black letters on the end—WILLIE WELCH.

It was a figure to catch the eye, even if the suitcase did not, and Betsy looked at it eagerly. She had heard something of Miss Willie Welch, but had never seen her.

A smiling face with bright dark eyes and many loose curls of graying hair about the temples; a mouth with compressed curves, as though under the dominion of a strong will; thin, nervous, sunburned hands were the first things she noted. The plain coat and the flat-heeled shoes suggested familiar bygones to Betsy, but the lace flounced hat and the sparkle of old-fashioned rings on the withered fingers contradicted the suggestion. Alto-

gether it was an odd figure and yet oddly attractive.

"Good morning, little misses," Miss Willie said with a nod and smile. "A charming morning for a drive, is it not?"

Her voice was very agreeable. There was a bright sense of comradeship that drew Betsy irresistibly.

Selma had stopped the horse, and was leaning forward. "How are you feeling today, Miss Willie?" she asked seriously.

The other made a quick, fluttering gesture with her brown hands that somehow reminded Betsy of a trapped bird. "Oh, I am taking the good with the bad, my dear," she replied lightly. "It is too perfect a day to spoil with thoughts of one's interior mechanism."

Betsy laughed sympathetically, but Selma was not to be diverted. "Mother told me to ask particularly if I saw you," she insisted. "Please, what am I to tell her?"

Miss Willie sighed, looking down the sunny road with eyes that were dark and wistful. Then she shook her curls resignedly. "If I must specialize, my dear," she said reluc-

tantly. "I shall have to confess that wretched member is in sad mutiny today. But pray," she ended abruptly, smiling suddenly again, "don't let us mention it. My love to your mother, and bring your little friend to see me when you come next," and she waved them on their way with a gay, compelling hand.

There was evidently nothing more to be had on the subject. Selma, entirely satisfied with having done her mission, jerked Dolly into a trot. "She just won't take care of herself," she told Betsy as they were at the foot of the last hill. "She ought to have treatment right along, but she won't stay away from home long enough to get cured. She comes right back as soon as she feels better."

Betsy was thinking of the invitation. Miss Willie's invitations were very rare and she was eager. "When will you take me to see her?" she asked.

Selma considered. "I'll have to go pretty soon with some stuff mother has for her," she said slowly. "Maybe on Monday—if you really want to go. She lives in a queer

old place, you know, and she's queer enough herself. But I guess she will be awfully nice to you, now she's asked you. She's like that."

She drew the buggy to the sidewalk as they reached the Worthington driveway where Betsy was to leave her. "We'll go on Monday maybe," she repeated; "but I'll see you before then, you know."

They smiled at each other, thinking of the afternoon at the circus, and Betsy paused for a moment on the sidewalk, looking up happily into the placid pretty face above her. Their friendship was only just beginning, for Selma had been away visiting ever since the birthday breakfast, and Betsy was eager for a companion of her own age and kind. Philip was a loyal comrade, but he was a boy after all, as he had proved by disappearing with the tail of the parade.

"It's so nice to have you home again," Betsy said warmly, as Dolly turned into the smooth, narrow drive. "We'll have lots of fun together this summer, won't we?"

Selma nodded, glancing back over her shoulder at Betsy's erect, graceful figure

standing in the flicker of sun and shade on the grass-edged path. All of her slow, placid heart had turned to Betsy on that first morning in the church aisle, and she had kept on admiring her more and more ever since. The story of Betsy's enterprise in the matter of the coffee premiums and of the garden seats had somehow leaked out—perhaps through Mrs. Hale's delight in her practical daughter's ability—and Selma never looked at Betsy without seeing a sort of halo about her smooth brown head. A girl who could do all that must be able to manage anything. She was ready to follow Betsy through a new world, always providing that she be allowed her own opinions on the matter.

"See you tomorrow at one o'clock for sure," she called as Dolly clattered in over the brick roadway. "Don't forget!"

Betsy walked off with her head in the air. How should she forget, when it would be the very first circus she had ever seen? Life was very pleasant to her on this fresh June morning. She stepped along gayly, thinking of the fun she was to have with Emma Clara

and Selma the next afternoon. She had forgotten Miss Willie and the invitation; she had forgotten the argument as to Jimmy Delaney and the discussion of the hospital, and her whole mind was full of joyful expectation. She would have forgotten to stop for the mail, as she had promised, on her way home, if the stage had not pulled up to the side door of the store just as she came up.

The driver answered the shouted question of the postmaster, as he flung the bag inside the store. "Yep, we're awful late this mornin'. Freight wreck down the road," he bawled. "Git a move on you, will you, with the bag. I'm a good two hours behind."

Betsy, knowing that the mail would not be ready for some time, loitered outside. A buggy with an apple-cheeked old lady in it was drawing up close to the stage and she wandered why the old lady ventured so close. "She'll lock wheels if she doesn't look out," she thought apprehensively. "She's very reckless."

She watched with absorbed interest, while the buggy pulled up so close to the side steps of the stage that the hubs fairly grated.

"She's very reckless," she repeated, and then she said half aloud, "Oh!"

For the stage door slid open and a very pale young man with one hand bandaged was leaning out of it, measuring the distance between the two steps with a crutch. "It's all right, Aunt Em," he said in a very weak, cheerful voice. "I can make it fine."

Betsy longed to help, but she stood very still and intent while the pale young man made the passage from the stage into the buggy. The stage driver came out and did his share, and the old lady leaned far over, helping all she could. Aided by the crutches and the two capable pairs of hands, the young man worked himself carefully off of one seat and onto the other, and then he sank down on the cushions, smiling into the pink perturbed face beside him.

"It's all right, Aunt Em," he told her gayly in his thin brave voice, and then the old lady took up the reins and, with an anxious glance at him, she steered the buggy away from the stage and the steady horse started off on a careful trot, down the shady Limekiln Road.

Old Ellis Naylor and Aaron Williams had come to the side door, and were peering out over their white beards with eyes that sparkled in spite of age and spectacles.

"Yes, siree, that's him," cried old Naylor through his false teeth. "That's Emma Myer's nevvy fresh from them big 'ospitals. All this time since he got back in God's country, he's been laid up and sufferin' somethin' turrible, they say. Came back all right, he did, but went off right spang with the State Police, he did. And got all broke up in a tussle with them pesky strikers up state. Got his leg busted, and a kink in his inside and there ain't no knowin' when he'll come around. That's luck, fer a feller who served his country like he done in France, yes, and in that blamed freezin' Roosia, too!"

Betsy walked into the store with her eyes a-light with interest. Although the great world war was a thing of the past, her patriotic soul went out in quick pity for the brave young man who had given so much service, and who had been sacrificed in times of peace for that beloved country. She wished she might help heal those wounds—that she

might help somehow to show part of the gratitude of the nation to that maimed and broken figure.

"Something ought to be done," she thought as she went mechanically to the mail-box. "A medal of honor, or—something. They ought to have rewards for wounds in peace just the same as in war. He was serving the flag and there ought to be something done."

Old Ellis and Aaron had come in behind her. Mr. Higbee, the postmaster, was staring through the mail-boxes at the diminishing buggy, while a knot of eager old faces clustered at the side window.

"That's him, sure enough," said Mr. Tomlinson, adjusting his little iron-framed spectacles to peer out over the shoulders before him. "That's Si Myers, I can swear. Emmy told me he was a-comin' for the day, whenever they let him off from the hospital down there in town."

Ellis Naylor broke in, clashing his false teeth in his excitement. "That's it," he cried. "He's a-takin' treatment, and he can't get off more'n a day. He's awful slow a-comin' around, they say."

Old Mr. Tomlinson shook his head. "He'd get well fast enough if they'd let him stay a spell," he said sharply. "He always did peak when he was from home. All he needs is a spell of this here good air."

Old Aaron's grumbling voice came burring through his beard: "Drat the pesky cities anyway! They're takin' too many of our boys nowadays, I say. Si Myers ought to come home—that's what he ought."

Mr. Higbee shook his head. "He needs treatment that he can't get here, I reckon," he said, as he turned to the work before him. "It's kinder to keep him where he'll get his treatment, I take it. Here's your mail," he ended, pushing out some letters to Betsy. He was a newcomer to the village within the year and he had not the same point of view as the others.

As Betsy walked slowly out through the front door she caught old Ellis Naylor's snort of contempt, and his emphatic retort rang out clearly in spite of his troublesome teeth.

"Kinder, is it, to keep a man from the spot his heart's set on, and to let him dwindle and

peak for a sight of the hills that bred him? I'd call it a heap kinder to fix up somethin' right here that 'ud serve fer treatin' his ill. That's what them high-falutin' doctors ought to do——"

She heard no more, for the screen door banged shut on her and she went down the front steps to the road in the bright sunshine, holding the mail in her fingers, while the old voices buzzed behind her and the argument went on. Her mind was very busy as her feet bore her along. Si Myers had brought a new reality with him, and she was in a whirl of emotions.

The summer breeze, as it came through the big trees before the store, lifted the folds of the great flag that hung across the road between the store and the hotel. It floated out against the blue sky, a bright, rippling mass of bunting, with the stars on its azure field gleaming in the sunshine and the vivid red stripes pulsing and undulating on the sweet summer air—a fitting emblem of the eternal hopes and hot endeavor of an idealistic republic.

Betsy looked up at it with a sudden lump in her throat.

"Oh, how beautiful it is!" she breathed with the tears stinging in her eyes, and she felt, without putting it into words, that it was a glorious privilege to live under that bright standard, and a higher honor to spend one's life for it.

All the patriotism which the sight of the maimed, heroic soldier-figure had brought to life, leaped into fuller being at the sight of the fluttering banner. She did not feel sorry for Si Myers now—it was not the part of the spectator to feel compassion for the victor. As she raised her wet eyes to the big flag floating out on the free air, she knew that the pale young man had bought a dearer right to that flag than any of those who pitied him.

She walked quickly along the road, with a backward glance now and again at the brilliant floating flag. Her thoughts ranged through the probable scenes where Si Myers had fought his way.

"What terrible things he has gone through," she thought. A surge of emotion tugged at her throat. She did not understand how deeply she was stirred. The voice of her patriotic forebears was calling her, and the

blood of the heroes of New England was stirring in her veins. She longed to be of service, too. At each backward glance at the bright banner, the longing grew.

"If I could only do something," she thought ardently. "If we could get some sort of medal for him. . . . it ought to be worth a good bit, too, so that it would be a real possession to hand down to his children and grandchildren. Oh, if I could only think of just the right thing! I've never done anything much for my country and it would be so splendid to help bring him his reward."

She passed the lane to the Simpson house and looked in, hoping for a sight of Emma Clara, whose sympathy was so ready. The house was closed, however, and there was no sign of life about the place. She walked on past the beechwood copse, not noting the beauty of the place as she usually did. She hardly saw the farmer busy with the young corn on the long sweep of the big field. When an excited Irish terrier dashed out of the hedgerow to greet her she barely noticed him with one absent pat on his eager head. She was lost in eager search for something she might do, some service she might render.

As she came into sight of the Wee Corner, nestling among its background of tall trees, she stopped suddenly with a light on her face.

"Maybe we might get a medal for him from Mrs. Bond's brother-in-law—he's a senator," she thought. Then her face clouded as that plan seemed unattractive. "It would be better to do it ourselves," she added. "Just Selma and Phil and I. I'll have to think it up, though, before I tell them about it."

She walked slowly to the gate, with Mac bounding ahead of her. "I can't think of anything now," she told herself as she snapped it shut behind her. "But I'll find something to do pretty soon. I'm sure of that."

Selma's words came back to her, and old Ellis Naylor's complaint as to the strictness of the city hospital. A momentary sense of the real need of the hospital for the village swept over her, but it was not for such practical work that she was thirsting. The vision of the flag did not reveal itself in that form to her.

"I'll find something yet," she said firmly, as she went around the corner of the little white house, followed by the neglected Mac. "I'll find something to do for my country right here at home."

CHAPTER III

Betsy Finds Something to Do

"BETSY! I say, Betsy! Are you deaf?"

There was no answer. Betsy was in the summer house with her fingers in her ears, reading for the tenth time her favorite "St. Valentine's Day." She did not hear Philip at all.

A brown hand with berry-stained finger-tips brought her out of the story with a jump. She did not wait to see who it was, but flashed out involuntarily at the interruption.

"Oh, how mean!" she cried, tearing her eyes away from the fascinating page. "We were just putting the food into the dungeon for the prince—" And then she saw Philip's face laughing down on her and she laughed, too. "I always get so excited at that part," she confessed. "And someone is sure to interrupt me every time."

Philip hardly noticed her words. He was breathless from haste, and he blurted out his astonishing news all in a lump. "What do you think," he cried with sparkling eyes. "The circus is going into camp down in Doc Stanton's meadow. And it's going to stay a week anyway. They've been chased out of Highville and they're hot on that burg—they say they'll never go there again."

She cut him off before he got further. "The circus coming here?" she asked in surprise. "Why, we were going to Highville this very afternoon——"

"Sure thing," he broke in on her. "There's a lot of them taken sick, and Doc Stanton has taken them under his wing. He was going by up there when the row broke out—you know how scary the Highville people are about their old town—and when he found that they were going to be run out of town for being sick, he just up and told them to come down here and be taken care of. He says there isn't a thing the matter with them but ptomaine poisoning, from eating canned things that had been opened for a while," he ended triumphantly.

His words sounded ominous to Betsy. "But that poisoning is a dreadful thing, isn't it?" she hazarded, frowning. "Mr. Bean died of it, I think."

Philip was ready to concede the minor point. "But it isn't catching, you see," he told her gleefully. "The stupids up there couldn't get it from the circus people if they tried—that's what makes me laugh. They've turned the circus out of their town on a false scare. It's a good joke on them."

Betsy brightened. She began to see the situation as he saw it, though she was still a bit mystified. "I thought Dr. Briggs was the best doctor around the whole country. How could he do such a silly thing?" she questioned.

"He's away on his vacation, and his assistant was out of town, and so the new one—old Deacon Hobbs' Johnny—was the only one on the job," explained Philip with relish. "He got rattled, I guess, and then the whole shooting-match of the town-daddies turned out and hustled the show out of sight. They bundled them out in short order, I can tell you."

"Is the whole circus here?" asked Betsy eagerly. "Tents and lioness and all?"

He nodded. "Come along and see them," he suggested. "That's what I came for. I thought you'd like a peep at them. You can see them plain as piping from Pebble Hill. The tents and wagons are all there, though the big tent isn't up, of course."

Betsy was beside him at the flag-path gate before the words were out of his mouth. "Oh, I'd love to," she said with that direct, frank enjoyment of the moment which was so satisfying to him. "Let's go straight off."

He told her the particulars as they went along up the red-shale road past the big trees and over the crest of the hill where she had seen her mother's slight figure against the sunset that day in February. "Half of them are awfully sick," he told her with the strange callousness of the normal boy.

"That elephant-man is the worst, though the bareback riders are all sort of limp and wobbly. Mrs. Delaney's tending to them in a wagon by themselves, and she's got the elephant-man in her own shed. She's a dandy, and she's pitched right in as though

she was just one of the family. She's as much at home with them as though she'd known them all her life."

Betsy was delighted to hear that her capable friend was on the field. "She'll make them get well if anyone can," she said hopefully.

"Yep, she's taken to nursing like a duck to water, Doc Stanton says," went on Philip, as they hurried up Pebble Hill. "Jimmy's there, too. He's been running his legs off doing all sorts of errands. There's a mighty lot to be done all at once, I can tell you."

Betsy was sure that he, too, had been doing his share, but they were on the top of the hill now, with the meadow spread out below them in full sight, and the gleam of the small canvas tents and the glint of the red-and-gold wagons caught the questions from her lips.

"Oh, what a lot of them!" she cried in surprise. "Why, I didn't dream there would be such a lot of tents and things!"

Philip was delighted with the effect of the teeming colony among the willows in the meadow. "It looks fine, doesn't it?" he exclaimed with as much pride as though it belonged to him. "It'll be mighty jolly to

have a circus right here in town. And they're going to give little shows—the well ones, I mean—so as to make something while the others are getting well."

"Are they all going to stay here?" asked Betsy with wide eyes.

He nodded. "Doc wanted to send them to a hospital at first, but they were all pretty poor and they couldn't afford to pay much and to go so far south again, so he just made it up with them to come here and stay rent free in his meadow until he had them in shape again. He says they'll all get well if they are careful, but he won't answer for it if they try to work too soon. He's going to cure them for nothing, too. I heard him tell the manager on the quiet."

Betsy glowed at this generosity. "It's just like him," she said warmly, and then with a change, "I should think those Highville people would be terribly ashamed of themselves when they hear that."

"Maybe they'll never hear it," laughed Philip. "Doc doesn't shout about his doings much. He'll have his hands full, I can tell you. Fifteen of them, more or less flattened

out. It's no joke. He's working away at them like a beaver, and jolly as you please, except when he got mad about finding that some of them were sleeping under the wagons. He ordered up a tent double-quick and he said, 'This sort of thing wouldn't happen if we had that blessed hospital here now'—only he didn't say 'blessed'."

Betsy laughed and then grew suddenly thoughtful as Philip talked on. He pointed out the gray bulk of the two elephants picketed near the brook far down the meadow. He showed her where the lioness' cage stood. "The Grave Digger is there, too," he said gloatingly. And then he switched back to the show people. "Gee, they can howl! You'd never think to see the manager riding along so smiling and bowing, that he'd kick up such a fuss over that kid of his. He just bellowed right out when the Highville guy tried to have the boy sent to the city hospital whether or no. He was fierce as anything until Doc Stanton came into the game. See, that's the men's tent there by the big sycamore. The boy's in there. He isn't very sick, though."

He pointed to a short row of small booths. "There are the side-show people," he told her. "There's a human skeleton and a sword-swallower and some other things. And the fat woman is the wife of the giant, though they don't let on to outsiders. He's from Cathness, and he knows where Mr. Gun's people used to live. I'll take you to see him when the shows begin. He's a regular Scotchy, and he wears a kilt when he's showing off."

Betsy was listening with only one ear, for, as she stared down at the meadow with its gleaming tents and gaudy wagons, she caught the ripple and flicker of a flag which had been run up on the largest tent. Something of the same pang that had stabbed her heart yesterday shot through it now. The need of service stirred strongly within her.

"These people are part of my country," she thought hurriedly. "And the wounded soldier and Miss Willie—all the sick people that need care and treatment are part of my country, and, oh, I did want something different to do, but this would be something that I could do," and with her hand on

Philip's cuff she blurted out her incoherent thought.

"We all ought to do things for our country and the flag," she said with a pucker between her delicate eyebrows. "We can help make it go, Philip,—really we can. And then the wounded soldiers and the circus people—if there ever are any more—can be taken care of right here."

"What are you talking about?" inquired Philip amazed by her eager manner. "Our country and the flag and wounded soldiers—what do you mean by all that stuff?"

She looked at him with imploring eyes. "Do listen till I'm quite through," she begged. "We ought to have a hospital right here. We—you and Selma and I—ought to do that for our country—for the flag. We can start it if we try. We can get people to give some money, and start it right away."

"You see," she ended, confidently, reassured by the growing interest in his face, "we can start things in just a tiny little way and then the others will do the real things. We can ask people from door to door, like the last suffrage campaign——"

He broke in on her again ruthlessly: "Not much of that for me," he declared roundly. "I'll do other things, but I won't go peddling about this village yet a while."

She was disappointed by his vehemence, but she had to yield. "All right, you can think up something else to help with," she told him, though she inwardly determined not to give up her suddenly conceived scheme of beginning the campaign for the hospital which she now found was the greatest need that she could serve. "You'll find something perfectly lovely to do, I know. Besides, it isn't as though we were trying to start something that nobody wanted. Squire Worthington and Doctor Stanton, and, oh, lots of others will be ready to take it right up and make it go."

They talked for a while longer, and then they parted, both very thoughtful: he to go down to the encampment in the meadow again, while she made her way to a big, overhanging rock nearby where she got a better view of the meadow. She meant to sit down and think it all over. She sat there a long time.

She Made Her Way to a Big, Overhanging Rock

At last she rose and went back to the Wee Corner. As she went, she turned over all the possibilities for interesting people by some new and daring method, and she found herself growing rather shaky on the subject when she thought of presenting the scheme to the elderly and prominent people who could accomplish the actual work of obtaining the funds and establishing the hospital.

"Oh, I could simply never dare speak of it myself," she thought in a panic as she saw the grave figure of the minister walking briskly along the highway from a call at the Wee Corner. "I couldn't speak to Mr. Caston about it, or—" She broke off in dismay, stopping short on the winding red-shale road that overlooked the highway and the nestling Wee Corner. "Why," she gasped, realizing her limitations. "Why, I couldn't speak to any grown-up person all by myself."

It was rather dashing to her confidence to find what a chill that blackcoated figure had given to her hot schemes. She walked more slowly down the winding hill, feeling that she had started something which had already proved too much for her. But her spirit,

though daunted, was not quenched. "I won't tell Philip that I'm afraid to do it by myself," she thought with a quirk of her brown head. "He'd tease dreadfully. I'll manage it somehow. I can't back out now."

As her hand was on the latch of the flag-walk gate, the glint of summer dresses showed behind the vines of the summer house. Mrs. Hale and Emma Clara were having a morning hour over Emma Clara's book of mosses from the neighborhood, and the minister's call having interrupted them, they were doubly absorbed in the fascinating work of mounting and labeling the specimens according to their families. Their voices were low and happy, and they laughed now and again at some speech that Betsy could not catch.

She went over the grass, making no noise, and stood for a moment looking at the picture they made there in the vine-circled arbor with the pink sweet-williams and blue lark-spur blooming at their feet. Mrs. Hale's fair head was bent beside Emma Clara's darker one, and her white dress mingled with the lilac folds of her companion's draperies. Betsy felt very proud of them both as she

looked at them, for she felt that her mother belonged to her, and that Emma Clara was in part her's, too. "They're both of them perfectly lovely in their own way," she thought ardently, and then she gave a little start as relief came to her, like a sudden ray of light.

"I'll tell them about it, and they'll begin it!" she thought hopefully. "They can do it if any two people can."

And then she broke in on them, intrepidly thrusting the hospital scheme in between them and the mosses with a ruthless confidence in them both. She told them breathlessly of the circus encampment, of the wounded soldier, and of Miss Willie's needs, and wound up with the words of Selma, explaining the attitude of the village, "They just won't get together. Highville will have it first—that is, if we don't do something right straight off," she ended vigorously. "Oh, do let's have a hospital here right away!"

Mrs. Hale looked at her with wide, reproachful eyes. "Betsy girl, are you tired of the Wee Corner already, that you want to turn it into a hospital?" she asked in astonishment.

Betsy came down from her heights with a

laugh. "I didn't mean here in the Wee Corner," she explained, and then she went on to tell just what she did mean.

Emma Clara, who had heard of the hospital scheme before, was quicker to see what was wanted than Mrs. Hale, who was newer to village hopes and rivalries than she, and she laid the situation before her in a few clear sentences which were very convincing.

Mrs. Hale nodded, and the busy brain that had been in such demand in organizing work back in the city clubs turned eagerly to this worthy project. "I'll do anything I can," she said quickly. "I'm only a newcomer, but I can help. Why shouldn't we have a woman's meeting? The Red Cross and the Missionary Societies ought to be interested. We could start things in that way and see what came of it."

"There's the doctor's machine down the road," said Emma Clara, pointing to a speck far down on the highway, which even Betsy's keen eyes had trouble to recognize. "Let's ask him what he thinks of it."

Betsy flew to the front gate. The gray runabout grew into life size and was waved to

a standstill. The doctor jumped quickly out, with his face grave.

"Is your mother ill again?" he asked, and then he caught sight of the two figures in the summer house. He looked relieved and pleased. Betsy's eager words were hardly heeded.

She followed him, as he went forward with his kind face alight with cordial goodwill, and she had never liked him so much as she did when she heard his hearty words of greeting and his offer of service before he knew what was to be required of him.

When he found it was his own neglected pet project that was presented, the pleased color flushed to his forehead and he shook hands again with them both. "It's been what I've hoped for and despaired of," he said simply. "I haven't carried it very far alone, as you know, but with such help you may be assured that I shall take new heart for the work."

Betsy wondered why Emma Clara got so red. It was quite cool in the arbor and she was sitting still, too. Mrs. Hale was not paying much attention to the words, since

the manner was so earnest. Her eyes were on the sentinel pines and she was arranging her plans as he spoke. "I think we should have the meetings at once," she said.

They fell into immediate plans, while Betsy sat down on the long chair outside and listened with a cheerful mind, with Mac, who had returned from a rabbit hunt, curled at her feet. They talked and argued and discussed, until something like a definite campaign had shaped itself when the doctor rose to say good-bye.

"I'll see the squire about a public meeting on Monday night—the sooner the better, as you say—and I'll do my part meanwhile. We'll make it go," he said resolutely. "We're sure to win if we pull together."

Betsy slipped away then, with Mac at her heels, for she knew that the matter was settled. "I've begun it, anyway," she said to herself. She had seen a white dress flutter on the long hill toward the village and she recognized Selma, even at that distance. When we are interested in the object we have very good sight indeed.

They met by the beechwood copse, and

"Oh, Betsy!" cried Selma, and "Oh, Selma!" cried Betsy.

But Betsy's eyes were dancing and her face beamed, while Selma was all under a cloud.

"We can't go to the circus after all," she called. "They're all sick and they can't——"

"I know," Betsy rippled out with joyous eagerness. "I heard all about it. I've a lot to tell you, too. Come into the woods and let's talk."

She pulled her into the beech grove to a fallen log they both knew. "Now then," she said buoyantly. "There's something we've got to do. It's for our country, so you can't get out of it." And then she unfolded her plan.

Selma's eyes grew rounder as she listened. Her forehead puckered at times, but in the end she grew almost as sanguine as Betsy herself.

"I don't know what mother will say to going—" she began, when Betsy interrupted briskly.

"You can't talk about things you haven't seen for yourself, can you?" she demanded

brightly. "We've just got to go tie up Mac in the barn and go to see those circus people before we make our calls, or we can't tell the ladies just how sick and desolate and forlorn they are, and if we don't talk a lot about that sort of thing, the people we call on mayn't be interested. We've just got to make them interested, you know."

Selma agreed, somewhat less brightly. "Yes, they've got to be interested, but I do hope that grave-digging hyena is shut up good and tight."

CHAPTER IV

The Ball Begins to Roll

BETSY and Selma had on their hats, a sign of ceremony.

They had taken the short-cut in order to reach the extreme other side of the village and had passed down quite close to the enclosure where the circus was encamped. Betsy had taken that route, as she explained to Selma, because the sight of the encampment would warm their hearts to their mission, and as they progressed with their project they would be drawing nearer home instead of going further from it. "We'll have started, anyway, even if we should meet Philip or Mother or anyone," she said stoutly.

Selma had agreed, although she did not appear greatly stimulated by the sight of the canvas fence about the mysterious enclosure.

When, however, they came into fuller view of it, both girls' faces showed surprise and some disappointment. For, in the meadow,

before the canvas fence, and particularly about the entrance, a great number of boys of all ages and kinds, with a smaller sprinkling of girls, were to be seen.

"Everyone for miles around has come to see them," exclaimed Selma. "Why, there's Willie Hopkins from the other side of Hopewell and Marion Green from Sugar Bottom. I declare if it isn't too silly to think of their coming all this way to see a circus camp."

Betsy said nothing, but her face flushed. It was going to be rather hard to run the gauntlet of all those staring eyes. Nevertheless, they had come with a good purpose and she was not going to back out for all the curious eyes in the country-side. She flung up her head a little higher and she walked with a brisker step. She led the way quickly along the narrow zigzag foot-path that ran across the meadow, and she looked neither to the right nor left.

At the entrance she bent her head in a dignified fashion at the rakish young man in a checked cap who was presiding over the matter of admissions.

"We should like to see Mrs. Delaney—on

particular business," she added as she saw the young man's cheerful though indifferent air. "We want to see her at once, if you please. We are particular friends of hers."

The young man grinned broadly. "Oh, yes, I dare say—most of 'em are," he said knowingly. "The woods is full of peticular friends of hern just now. Half of that bunch out there come a-askin' for Mrs. Delaney. Sorry she's engaged so very peticular. Call again in about two weeks and she'll be able to see you." And he seemed to consider the matter ended, for he shoved his cap over his eyes and turned to a package of small posters on the board before him, beginning to sort them over, with the aid of his thumb and a liberally moistened finger.

Betsy tried to attract his attention by repeating her request, but as he paid no attention whatever to it, she gave up in disgust, and turning quickly without even a glance at Selma or the staring, chuckling boys who lingered about the pathway, she walked with increased speed back across the meadow toward the first straggling houses of the village. It was plain that the miscarriage of her scheme had greatly disturbed her.

It was Selma who broke the tense silence. "Well, we didn't make out much there," she said calmly. "Are you going to make the calls now?"

Betsy was walking very fast. She had a red spot on each cheek, her eyebrows were drawn together in a severe line, and her freckled nose was tilted loftily. She looked a very severe person altogether.

"Of course I shall make the calls," she said in a low, clear voice. "We are going right on. Duty is the same thing to us, whether those circus people make mistakes or not." And then she added in quite a different tone, "But I think it was perfectly hateful of that young man to think we were like all those others. He might have seen that we were different."

Selma appeared unmoved. "I saw through the flap at the gate," she said. "The lioness' cage is away off beyond a little tent. I do hope the bars will hold tight while they're here. I'd hate to be eaten by a wild animal here in——"

Betsy interrupted her with strained patience. "Let's be thinking what we shall say

to Mrs. Johnson. She's the first, because she's the nearest," she suggested, feeling that such indifference to their cause was very hard to bear at this particular moment. "See, there she is on the porch. She's easy enough to find, at any rate."

Mrs. Johnson was indeed easy enough to find, for she was a large, slow woman, whose chief afternoon occupation was to sway her large bulk comfortably to and fro in the red rocker on her little porch, which looked all the smaller for her ample proportions. She saw them coming, and before anything further could be arranged between them, they found themselves standing before her portico being questioned by her slow, exact voice.

"Did you get in? Children are so curious; I suppose they like to see everything, and they usually do see everything. Are they very ill? And what sort of fence is that they have around this end? I can't see very well from here," she said with leisurely enjoyment, swaying in time with the large palm-leaf fan she was using.

If they had been successful in the matter just ended it would have been easier to answer

the inquiries happily. As it was, Selma took her usual course of letting Betsy speak for both, while Betsy took up the necessity with her customary self-forgetfulness.

"They aren't letting anyone in, Mrs. Johnson," Betsy answered. "They have canvas all along this end of the meadow and you can't see a thing inside of the camp. But they're very ill indeed in there. I know a good deal about them, for Dr. Stanton told us just a little while ago, when he had come from helping them get settled."

She had struck the right path. Mrs. Johnson leaned forward with interest. "Do you say so?" she exclaimed. "And what did the doctor say about them? I suppose you heard everything he said—children are so very curious. Sit down, do."

Betsy told her all that she knew of the sufferings of the afflicted ones and then when Mrs. Johnson was in full enjoyment of the details, she struck into the theme of the hospital. "It will only be a very small one," she told her in a rush of eager words. "Dr. Stanton says that almost any old house could be remodeled and put in shape for a

hospital. That part wouldn't take so very much, he says, and if we'd all get together and push things, the rest of it—the two nurses and supplies and all that—would soon be arranged. Won't you put your name to the top of our list, Mrs. Johnson? It's only to show that you are interested. It doesn't pledge you to anything, you see."

Mrs. Johnson stopped her rocker and looked sideways at the animated face beside her. She seemed to find what she was seeking there, for she smiled and reached out one plump hand for the pencil that Betsy held uncertainly toward her.

"Since it isn't binding me to any particular offering," she said with slow good nature, "I don't mind starting your little list."

She wrote her name in a clear, even hand, and gave it back to Betsy with a little gurgling laugh. "It's a nice thing to see you young creatures doing your duty by your fellow-man," she said, beaming on them impartially. "I shall be thinking of you all the rest of the afternoon—you and those poor folks over yonder. I declare I shall."

They said good-bye, grateful to her for her

ready sympathy with their cause, and they went hopefully toward the next house to be visited. "That was awfully easy," commented Selma placidly. "We'll get through fast enough if they're all so quick about it."

"They won't be, though," prophesied Betsy, who had memories that Selma did not share. "They'll talk yards, some of them, and then won't sign. People are like that. The ones you expect to be slow are quick, and those you hope to be through with in a jiffy hang on forever. You never know how Mrs. Giles will take things."

It was to that lady's house that their way now led them, and they were fortunate here, in so far as finding her at home. She was pottering about the trim flower-bed, picking a faded leaf here and there with careful fingers in deference to her afternoon dress of precise spotted lawn. She looked up as the gate clicked.

"Ah, your mother sent that recipe, I suppose," she said, ignoring Betsy. "I was a-hoping she'd recollect it. The berries is coming in so fast now, and I'll have a big batch bright and early a-Monday. I'm right glad to have it."

Selma looked slightly disturbed. "Mother isn't home today, Mrs. Giles," she said in her soft voice. "I'll bring it right over when she comes back tonight though."

The light died from Mrs. Giles' face. "Ah, well," she said half to herself. "It ain't to be expected that my affairs should be very pressing. I can wait, of course." She turned to Betsy with a pounce. "How's your mama? I haven't seen her at church these two weeks. I hope that novel writing hasn't turned her heart from her religion."

Betsy was touched in a tender spot by criticism of her mother, but she retained her self-control, and she had her errand in mind. "Indeed, she is just as fond of church as ever, Mrs. Giles," she answered earnestly, looking up into the puckered, unfriendly face. "She's been away for a week on business, and the other Sunday she had a headache, and the doctor won't let her go out if she feels tired, you know. He's a very good doctor, and she wants to do just as he says. We all think he's a good doctor, don't we, Mrs. Giles?"

Mrs. Giles puckered her withered lips.

"H-m-m," she grudgingly agreed. "He is well enough in his way. He oughtn't to keep folks from the house of worship, though."

It was a poor beginning. Selma looked dismayed, and even Betsy felt the chill strike deep. She rallied, however, and went to her task valiantly, for she had caught a glimpse of the big flag far down by the cross-roads and it had waved its inspiring message to her just in time.

"It was a pity Mr. Si Myers had to leave so soon," she said cheerfully. "I believe if he could have stayed here Doctor Stanton could have done as much for him as any of those fine doctors in town."

Mrs. Giles responded instantly. "That's what I say," she cried with unusual warmth. "He hadn't ought to go away. He hadn't ought to have gone in the first place. It's a sin and a shame to send our fine lads to them nasty revengeful strikers to get cut to pieces for them foreigners with their riots and their sinfulnesses. That's what I say it is—a sin and a shame!"

This was not the point Betsy had aimed at, and for an instant she was unable to collect

her argument, but, fortunately for her, Selma's soft sentences filled the gap.

"But someone has to help, you know," she said quietly. "Father is very proud of Si Myers, and he says we ought to feel honored by his deeds. He only wishes we could keep him here and make him well and strong with this good air——"

Mrs. Giles interrupted with a sniff. "That's men's talk," she said contemptuously. "They're all for rending and tearing. That's what they call duty. It's a sin and a shame, I say." She was so firm that Betsy's heart sank. She made her last effort.

"Everybody is praising him, though," she ventured. "They're terribly proud of him, and I heard Mr. Tomlinson say that Highville hadn't a single man in the State Police——"

"Ah, that's true, that's true!" broke in Mrs. Giles with a sudden change of front. "Highville never was so patriotic as we are here. We're ahead of 'em in that as we are in every other blessed thing." Then she relapsed again. "Why don't they send them foreigners at the mill there. They'd

do well to be shot to pieces, instid of our own fine lads."

She was chilling enough now, but she had shown her vulnerable point, and even Selma saw the loophole. "We've the best library and better preachers," she began, trying the ground. "But Highville had the moving-picture theater and a policeman and a new fire truck. I guess it'll have the hospital, too, and then all of our people will have to go there to get cured."

Betsy struck in as she saw the effect. "Doctor Stanton says we can do it if we'll all help," she said stoutly.

"And there'd be lots of people to go in it, right spang off," added Selma.

"Highville will be sorry enough that it turned them out when they see what will come of it," prophesied Betsy with her head in the air. She was beginning to enjoy the venture now.

The old lady looked from one to the other, her mouth falling open and her false teeth dropping loosely together, as they did occasionally when the tight grip of her tense lips relaxed.

"What in the nation are you two chattering about?" she asked in amazement. "What's circus folks to do with us folks—play-acting critters that they are, lures of Satan to the worldly-minded. Who's talking about Highville getting a hospital?"

They explained in an eager flood of detail. They told her all the reasons for the modest little hospital, and they ended with an urgent request for her name at the head of Selma's list. Betsy had insisted that they both arm themselves with pad and pencil, and she was glad that she had done so when she saw how partial the old lady evidently was to the pretty daughter of the squire.

"We're going to get the names of the prominent people," said Selma with something of her father's manner. "When the meeting is opened Monday night, we will have the lists ready to be read out. You want to be the first on mine, don't you?"

Mrs. Giles breathed hard. She was no pioneer, but the lure of being among the prominent first signers was too strong for her caution. She took the pencil. "I'd best set down to it," she said, seating herself

stiffly on the bench beneath the Judas tree. "I'm not much of a scribe these days."

Betsy watched while she slowly and laboriously wrote the line, and then as she glanced at the signature as Selma took the pad, she exclaimed in genuine admiration, "How beautifully you write, Mrs. Giles. It's like printing. What a lovely beginning for Selma's list!"

Mrs. Giles smiled broadly. It was not every stray body who had recognized in her present hand the writing-mistress of her expert past. She looked more kindly at Betsy. "You tell me when that meetin's to be and I'll come," she promised. "I ain't saying that I can do much, but I ain't going to see Highville overstep us yet awhile."

She dismissed them very graciously, and the two girls went down the path well satisfied with their effort.

"It didn't matter, after all, about seeing the circus people, you see," Selma told Betsy calmly. "Mrs. Giles didn't care a snap about them, and half of the rest of them will be like her."

Betsy was silent. She could not help

regretting the failure of that part of her scheme. The graphic pictures she had hoped to paint of the strangers within their gates, suggesting the good Samaritan in its application, would have been very satisfying to her. She had to confess, however, when their rounds were ended and they were on their way to Miss Willie Welch's detached place, where they were to make a purely social call, that Selma had been a truer prophet than she cared for. Twenty names were on Selma's list and only ten on her own, and of that ten only five had been interested in the cure or care of the show people.

"It's been different from what I had hoped," she said dubiously. "I thought they'd be more worked up over it. It's very thrilling, I think."

Selma laughed comfortably. "They don't get worked up around here over anything like that," she declared. "You don't know them yet, I guess. Here we are, though, and I don't see a thing of Miss Willie. I wonder if she isn't home?"

They were at the door of the shady, vine-covered, weather-beaten house, where the

weeds and flowers rioted in the formal garden-beds and the grass grew between the bricks of the branching pathway. The place was deserted apparently, for there was no sound except the wind stirring in the leaves and the cry of a pee-wee from the old apple tree behind the house.

"She must have gone away again," said Selma rather perplexed. "I wonder why she didn't say so yesterday."

Betsy was too busy looking about her to speculate as to the owner's absence. "What a queer old place," she said softly; "but I like it. It's so different from the rest of the village."

"I should hope it was," said Selma scornfully. "I'd hate to live in a place that was all drooping about with vines and stuff like this. Let's hurry back now, and tell your mother what we've done. She'll be surprised, I guess."

Betsy tore herself away from the charms of the mysterious old place. She looked back reluctantly as they passed out of the door-yard. "I'd love to come again," she said dreamily. "It's like an enchanted house.

I'm sure there are fairies in the well there, or perhaps a Nickleman——"

Selma brought her back to realities with a little exclamation.

"There's Philip Meade waving to us," she said, pulling at her sleeve, "Do come along and see what he wants."

Betsy promptly forgot the Nickleman and the other fairies in the exciting moments that followed. The lists were flaunted rather too proudly in Philip's eager face, and the breathless account of their afternoon expedition was babbled out to him all in a burst, while he kept breaking in on the jumble with bits of praise and broken beginnings of a speech of his own. Finally he brought things to a climax in his own way.

"You ought to have had a permit from the doctor," he told them from the lengths of experience. "I got mine all O. K. But that's what you get for sneaking off by yourselves. We're all going to do our share in *my* stunt. I've got it mapped out fine and dandy."

He paused, enjoying their eager attention.

"It's going to be a parade, and a dandy,

too," he told them. "We're to put it through on Monday afternoon, so as to get the people worked up enough for that meeting. Come along to the old log and I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER V

Philip Lends a Hand

"NOW then, are you all ready?"

It was Monday afternoon and the great event which was to waken the village to its need of a hospital was about to take place.

Philip had his hands full and even his masterly spirit was a trifle perturbed. "Those stupids won't do a thing I tell them," he confided impatiently to Betsy. "I guess they've never even seen a parade. Look at that Sheenlan boy with his hay wagon—he's bound to be in the front when I've told him over and over that the heavy pieces must be in the rear!"

"There's a good lot of them, anyway," said Betsy proudly. "I don't see how you got so many."

Philip sighed as he looked at the forty boys and girls assembled under his banner. There were many turbulent spirits among the motley

groups and more than once, in the hour they were gathering behind the red-frame Castle of the Knights of the Golden Cuckoo, had he felt that it might have been better if he had not asked so many from the outlying farms, or insisted so strongly on their bringing some sort of horse or team.

"I wanted to have as many riders and drivers as we could, but those old, rickety buggies and the hay wagon makes me sick," he said in disgust. "The people will think we're a lot of hoboes. I'd rather had the boys parade along themselves. They're not a bad lot, you know, but some of those horses look ready to lie down in their tracks."

"They are pretty bony, and sprung in the knees," agreed Betsy cheerfully; "but no one will look at them—they'll be too busy reading the banners. The banners will make up for everything. Besides, we have some good turnouts. Look at Emma Clara's buggy! I think Selma will give in now and say it was right to ask her."

Philip brightened as his eye rested on the three gaily decorated vehicles that were to carry Emma Clara, Selma and Betsy. "They

look fine and dandy," he said warmly. "They'll make the hit of the season. Now, if Jimmy will only show up we can start. The bells are beginning to ring, and we'll have to go pretty soon if he doesn't come. Here, you, Tom Freeman, you belong back of Selma's buggy. Wait, I'll help you turn around."

He hurried off to lend a hand with Tom Freeman's borrowed steed, which seemed inclined to be a trifle balky, and Betsy was left to look over the long line of the procession, which was now nearly ready to start. "It's a splendid parade," she thought with dancing eyes, "and he got it up so quickly. We couldn't have done it without Emma Clara, though. She made such clear, neat lettering on the banners, and got up some pretty good mottoes, too."

Selma had opposed Miss Simpson being brought into the affair on the ground that she was rightfully a grown-up, though Betsy and Philip both strongly urged that although she was all of the venerable age of nineteen, she seemed young enough to be of great service. Selma did not carry her point, there being two voices to her one, but she still regarded

Emma Clara as much too elderly to make one of the paraders, and she had viewed Emma Clara's buggy with a nod of satisfaction when it drew into the procession. "I'm glad she trimmed it with all those vines and flowers," she had whispered to Betsy. "It was nice of her to feel how old she'd look among the rest of us."

Betsy smiled to herself as she recalled Selma's words. "I know that Emma Clara didn't cover herself with honeysuckle and rhododendron for that, though." she thought. "It's because she's so modest and she didn't want everyone to see who it was had the most beautiful wagon. She's so sweet. I wonder what Philip is going to do? He's been so secret about it, I suppose it's something funny." She paused as the bells stopped ringing. "Oh, dear, I wish Jimmy would come," she said. "We're late now."

The ringing of the village bells had been a master-stroke of genius on Philip's part, for they told the neighborhood that something unusual was about to take place, though they did not reveal just what that something was to be. Philip had friendly relations with

most of the men in the place and the three janitors of the little outlying churches had each promised to do this much for him, on faith that something good was to come of it. Perhaps the mysterious poster that appeared at the cross-roads beneath the flag-pole helped, too, but whatever it was, the bells had been ringing lustily for ten minutes by the clock, and the village, which had also read the poster, was gathering for the event.

The poster, in large uneven letters, urged everyone to

WATCH THIS PLACE ON MONDAY AT 2 P. M.
LADIES AND CHILDREN INVITED
MEN OF ALL AGES, SICK OR WELL, ARE
REQUESTED TO BE THERE
WHEN THE BELLS BEGIN TO RING

It had been marvelous in its effect, and the various boys and girls interested in the affair had been sworn to such strict secrecy by Philip that not a breath of the real nature of the event had leaked out. If any of the parents had guessed that their boy or girl was to be a conspicuous object that afternoon, no doubt many of them would have come in

shining turnouts and fast-stepping horses instead of the broken-down hacks and dilapidated vehicles that had been granted them. As the bells ended their tolling, a fringe of smiling, half-apologetic people was forming on the grassy edge of the main road in the heart of the village, while on the porches and doorways other smiling faces showed. The people were ready to turn it into a joke if the summons proved a hoax.

Philip had chosen the red Castle because it was over the brow of the hill and therefore unseen from the cross-roads, and because its large bulk afforded a good screen for the assembly while forming. He had urged that the various participants should come from various points and singly, lest suspicion be aroused and their meeting place discovered. It was fortunate that all the boys and girls for miles around were in the procession, or it never could have been kept from their eager eyes. Men and women are not apt to pry about so much—perhaps because they are ashamed to show their curiosity.

"I wish Jimmy would come," said Betsy to herself again, as she took up the reins. She

was driving Mr. Gaston's old horse, borrowed somehow by the enterprising Philip. "I wonder what Jimmy will—oh, there he is now! How cute!"

Jimmy Delaney, mounted on the self-same tiny donkey which had led the circus parade, was taking his place as she spoke. The tiny donkey wore the gay trappings as before and the furry ears which had won Selma's admiration were cocked knowingly. Jimmy made a striking figure as he led the long string of attendant vehicles out from behind the red Castle and toward the waiting village, for he was an exact duplicate of the small clown, having borrowed the costume from the manager's son, who was still too sick to attend the parade.

"Here we go," said Betsy to herself as they began to move. She felt more excited than she had ever done in all her quiet life. "Oh me, how shaky I feel! I hope I don't get my reins crossed or anything!"

Out into the road trailed the long file, with Jimmy's funny figure at the head. Betsy at first kept her eyes on Selma's buggy, which was directly ahead of her own, and then, as

they topped the hill, she let the old horse amble as it would, while she stared back through the little window at the back of the curtain, gloating over the array that followed in her wake. "We'll make them think the hospital is a real thing," she said exultantly. "They'll be terribly interested after they see all of these banners and—oh, I wish I could see Philip. I'm wild to know what he's doing. He stuck himself at the very tail, though, and I can't catch a scrap of a look at him."

Philip was indeed hidden from her sight, for he rode at the very end of the parade, with a banner which no one had seen until he swung into line, and of which, consequently, most of the paraders were unconscious. He kept the long file before him, while Jimmy Delaney in his borrowed plumage rode gaily at its very front, laughing and joking in true clown style; and so they came to the cross-roads where the smiling people waited in patient uncertainty.

As the first eyes caught the long line sweeping up over the hill, there was a murmur and a rustle of pleased approval—the people were

glad that they were not to be hoaxed after all, and they showed their appreciation by bursting into hearty applause as Jimmy rode toward them. "Here comes the clown!" shouted the men on the store porch. "Golly, he's a clever, one! Look at that, will ye?"

Jimmy, who had rehearsed privately and with much zeal, put the donkey on its hind legs when he reached the cross-roads, and clinging to the saddle he rode the plucky little beast half-way up the main road that way. The few plain buggies which Philip had put between him and the next attraction were hardly looked at as they trundled past, for every eye was on the white-faced clown and his mincing steed. Laughter ran along the street as he made his slow progress, and when he dropped his beast to four feet again in order that the donkey might throw him off over his head, the shouts and ripples of merriment sounded far and near.

Betsy, who was in the second attraction, heard it with a thankful heart.

"They like it," she said in relief. "Oh, they like it tremendously. But they don't understand yet."

It did not take the bystanders long to comprehend the reason for the display, however, for Selma's gay red-white-and-blue carriage bore the huge inscription—

"WE WANT A HOSPITAL HERE AT HOME."

Another sort of murmur swept along the sidewalks then, a murmur that had a deeper note in it. Betsy heard one man say, "And kids like them, too," and she felt all her fears fade away. She was glad that her flower-trimmed buggy had a big motto, too.

"Well, that's sense," declared another masculine voice, reading the lettering on her white banner.

"WE HAVE THE BEST LIBRARY AND
HIGH SCHOOL.
WHY NOT THE ONLY HOSPITAL?"

Well, that's real good sense. Why hain't we no horsepital, anyway? Durn it, we're the best bunch hereabouts, and——"

She caught no more, for her wheels moved on, and the man broke off to read Emma Clara's big text,

"SHALL HIGHVILLE HAVE IT?
OR SHALL WE?"

and then his voice died out among the other voices and noises behind her, and she could catch only the louder bursts of sound which told her in a confused way what part of the procession was passing.

A loud burst of laughter and a shout of "Hello, Tibbins," told her that Fred Harper in his toy-policeman's uniform with the motto,

"WE DON'T ARREST SICK PEOPLE HERE,"

was passing the corner where most of the crowd was gathered.

A hushed murmur followed in which she knew that the Freeman boys had claimed general attention in their Boys' Brigade uniforms with heads and arms bandaged and the drapery along the sides of their wagon showing in big bold lettering the request,

"LET US COME HOME TO GET WELL."

It was an appeal that went home to the hearts of many there, who had seen and known Si Myers, and the clapping broke out louder than ever as the pathetic group went its way.

The procession had wound its way around the main road and was looping back on itself by way of Green Lane and the Rectory Road,

and Betsy, near to the head of the line, was almost at the cross-roads again when the Freeman boys were passing behind the screening trees by Squire Worthington's house, just beyond the store corner. The tail of the parade was passing the corner and she leaned forward eagerly to see Philip, who was behind the last farm wagon.

"Oh, bother," she began, and then she caught her breath and stopped, with her heart beating in proud surprise. "Oh, Philip," she said under her breath. "Oh, Philip Meade, how *sweet* of you!"

For, as the last farm wagon rumbled by, and while the groups on the grass-edged sidewalks were still talking in earnest undertones of the wounded soldiers and their many needs, Philip Meade rode out into the sunshine, a knight in very earnest!

His horse was caparisoned in trailing white with the ruddy eight-pointed cross on its forehead and sides, while Philip sat erect, in shining cap and flowing white mantle, with the eight-pointed, blood-red cross on his shoulder, and by his side a cross-hilted sword. On his free arm hung a pointed shield, while

with his right hand he supported the staff of a fluttering white banner, the golden fringes streaming in the air.

"A Templar!" exclaimed Mr. Gaston, who was standing with the Squire and a group of excited ladies by the Worthington driveway. "A Knight Templar, upon my soul!"

"And see what he has on his flag!" cried Mrs. Bean, pointing to the rippling banner which caught the sunshine as if to throw out its message to everyone who would receive it.

Betsy stopped her horse—she positively could not help it—and stretching far out of her flowery buggy, she read the glancing golden letters, "In His Name." She caught her breath in surprise. Laughing Philip a Knight of the Temple and a soldier under such a banner! She could scarcely believe it until there flashed upon her the memory of another Philip—a Philip sobbing in the woods with his heart breaking for a dying father.

A rush of tears filled her eyes. She was too proud of him to care whether they were seen or not. She rode back to the starting place in a whirl of emotions. The merry enterprise

took on the reality which it was. The parade, which had begun so gaily and carelessly, grew suddenly into great and glorious purposes. Betsy had found that the hospital was a labor well worth the starry, brilliant standard that still floated out on the free air at the cross-roads.

"It is for our country and In His Name," she whispered to herself as she steered the old horse toward the red Castle. "I'll never forget that *now*."

It was such an epoch in her emotions that she was almost startled by Selma's first words, when they met in the joyous jumble at the red Castle.

"Wasn't Jimmy cute?" Selma said warmly. "He put them all in such a good humor that they liked every scrap of it."

"Jimmy?" echoed Betsy with a ring of scorn in her clear voice. "Why, *any* one could have played a clown's part, but I think nobody could have done what Philip did half so well. He was perfectly stunning."

"Oh, yes, he looked nice, didn't he?" answered Selma, without much emotion. "He got that flag from the church. It belongs to

the Christian Endeavor, and I think it was rather horrid of him to take it without asking. I don't see why he wanted a peaceable flag like that, though, when he had a sword and shield like a regular soldier."

Betsy turned from the task of explaining Philip to her practical friend. This was one of the occasions when she found Selma difficult to love. "He was fine to do it," she said briefly, "and I think he was right not to tell anyone. It would have spoiled it if he had told."

Selma made room for her in her own flowery buggy, "Come along, and we'll catch the people before they go home," she offered. "I saw your mother going into our house, and Mrs. Bean went, too. We——"

Betsy shook her head. Even the prospect of such triumphs did not lure her. "I'm going to stop with Emma Clara," she said firmly. "We're to wait for Philip and help take back the things he's borrowed."

Selma smiled good-naturedly down at her. "Oh, very well," she said mildly. "But I should think you'd like to hear what they say about it. I'll see you tonight, anyway,"

and she drove off, while Betsy stood looking after her with a little stab of compunction pricking at her heart.

"She's a dear," she told herself, as she turned to join Emma Clara in the vestibule of the red Castle where the borrowed things had been hastily dumped. "And I'm a criss-cross thing to be sharp with her. I'd rather be with Emma Clara and Philip just now, though. They'll understand how thrilly it all is—the flag and the clapping and all. They're like that themselves."

She went lightly up the wooden steps, and her face was shining as she cried, "Oh, Emma Clara, wasn't it perfectly lovely? And aren't you simply wild to see how they behave tonight? I believe they're wakened up for good now, and we'll have the hospital here after all."

CHAPTER VI

Small Beginnings

BETSY came home from the public meeting on Monday night with her head in the air.

"Wasn't it glorious to hear our lists read and see how the people all sat up straight when their names were called out?" she said happily. "And I think everyone will feel differently about Philip, too. I heard Miss Wilson say she hoped she'd never go so far astray as she had with 'that young monkey's character.' She knows what he's really like now, and so do all the rest of them."

Mrs. Hale patted the hand that rested in her arm. "Well, the hospital has done that much for us, if it never does more," she returned lightly. "Philip doesn't take his honors gratefully, I'm afraid. He seemed very uneasy when Mrs. Giles was talking with him before the meeting opened."

Betsy giggled. "He told me she made him

sick," she confessed. "He wishes he'd never been a knight if he's to be pestered about it the rest of his days. He hates fussing, you know. He'd rather do things than talk about them."

Mrs. Hale laughed and then she said earnestly, "How fine it was of the doctor to offer that meadow lot, if no suitable house could be found. It's the only thing he owns and it was so good of him to be willing to strip himself for the cause. I hope they find another place, though, for it doesn't seem fair to take both his land and half of his services free. The others ought to do their share."

Betsy swung open the front gate with a flourish. "We're all going to do our very best,' she declared hopefully. "After all that was said tonight, we ought to have the hospital in no time."

Mrs. Hale smiled down into her eager face in the dim starlight. "Oh, my dear Betsy-girl," she said, with a tender note in her sweet voice. "You have forgotten what a wide gap there is sometimes between the happy first thought and the hard-won finish of the dearest scheme. Don't put too much

of your heart in it just yet, for you may be hurt by unlooked-for delays."

Betsy squeezed her mother's arm as they went up the path together. The tender note nestled in her heart, but the warning went quite past her. "Oh, I don't believe there will be much delay," she said confidently. "Squire Worthington has promised three hundred dollars, and Mr. Higbee one hundred, and Mr. Tomlinson fifty, and all the others together will make up a great sum. I shouldn't wonder if there would be enough to build a whole new building, instead of using an old one."

The key was in the door and when they were inside and the bolt slid into place, there was the clock to be wound and a note left for Mary, the maid, who had come to them just a week ago from Mrs. Warren. Mac had to be called in and put to bed. Nothing more was said about the doctor's offer, though they did talk a great deal about the various proposals that had been made by the others, as they went upstairs to bed.

Betsy paused on the landing with her bedroom candle unlighted. "Wasn't it perfectly

sweet of Emma Clara to offer to make dresses for children?" she said warmly. "The doctor thought it was quite noble of her, and he told her so, too. She never said a word, though."

Mrs. Hale seemed inclined to pass the matter of the doctor's speech over as lightly as possibly. "She can certainly make pretty dresses, as we know, and she will have her hands full if she takes all the orders that she will get," she returned, as she kissed Betsy good-night. "Now, run along to bed, my dear, for it's far beyond your hours."

Betsy kissed her rather absently, and went upstairs with her head buzzing with delicious forecastings of the future.

She undressed quickly, and wrapping her kimono about her sat by the dormer window to look out over the star-lit world and to dream and plan. The tall pines by the summer house caught her dreamy gaze. They were beautiful in the dim light, with the flicker of late fireflies about their trunks and their open, straggling branches full of sparkling stars.

"They look like real Christmas trees,"

thought Betsy with a lifting of her heart at the memory of that season of peace and goodwill. The peaceful, happy night seemed a hopeful augury for the enterprise they were embarking on.

She sat thinking very hard and sighing impatiently from time to time. At last she found her solution. "I know what I'll do," she said, getting up with a satisfied nod. "I'll take Selma into it, because she has that old piano in the L, where she does her scales. No one would mind our using that, and it will be just the thing for beginners to thump on."

She went to bed and to sleep at once, with that characteristic promptness which was part of her. Once she had a matter settled, she did not brood over it. And she knew that this one was settled.

She found that it was not only settled but enthusiastically disposed of, when she told Selma her plan the next morning at mail time. Selma saw relief for her own tortured hours of practicing in the prospect unfolded to her by Betsy.

"We'll have them come and see just how we do each exercise, and then when you are

through with the piano, one of them can take her turn," Betsy told her. "I'll come over, of course, because I'll be one of the teachers."

"One of them!" exclaimed Selma. "You'll be the only one. I couldn't teach a single note I've ever learned, though I've been at it for a whole year. I'll go through those horrid scales for them, but I won't teach them a single, solitary note on my own account."

Betsy sighed, for she knew that tone too well to argue with it. "All right," she said patiently. "I'll do the teaching then, and you'll lend the piano and do part of the scales. We ought to get plenty of scholars at our price. Fifteen cents a lesson is very cheap."

Selma agreed reluctantly. She seemed to regret the fact. "Perhaps people who need such awfully cheap lessons won't have pianos to practice on," she suggested. "What are you going to do about that?"

Betsy had overlooked that important possibility in her fervid planning, but she surmounted the difficulty in a thoughtful instant. "We'll get our pupils first," she told Selma crisply. "And then, if we have enough, we'll ask the Ladies' Aid if they mayn't use

the piano in the Church Annex. It's for a good cause and their piano is fearfully old and out of tune, anyway. They can't use it for singing any more."

This seemed a happy solution of Selma's query, and they started on their quest for pupils at once. That was Betsy's way.

There is no need to go through all the trials that were theirs in the next two hours. It is enough to say that they emerged triumphant at the end of that period, with their spirits somewhat battered but beginning to soar. The petition to the Ladies' Aid made them simply float. That came to anchor in the bare play-room in the L, where Selma's worn piano kept company with other relics, and where they could gloat undisturbed over the result of their labors.

"I'd never had the courage to talk it up like you did," said Selma admiringly. "You made them think that music lessons were the most magnificent thing in the world."

Betsy looked thoughtful. She had forgotten her inspired eloquence. "Well," she replied slowly, "so they are, in a way. If we didn't have music, it would be a queer world,

wouldn't it? We got seven, anyway, and that's the main thing. I shouldn't have been able to speak to Mrs. Harris about the Ladies' Aid piano like you did, though," she added, recalling a past Barrel Packing for that organization. "It's fine of them to be going to give a supper for the Hospital Fund, I think. They do give such good suppers."

"And they always make about seventy-five or eighty dollars," said Selma.

"Then there's Mrs. Bean's garden party—that will be great fun for us girls," went on Betsy. "And the lovely Scotch giant told Philip he was going to give a show right here, and give all the money to the hospital."

Selma looked doubtful. "I'm glad he's going to give shows here," she said; "but I don't see why he doesn't go to another town and get their money for us. We're giving all we can, or we're going to give, I hope."

Betsy was lost in joyful anticipation and she shook off the doubt with a little laugh. "Oh, we're going to have lots of fun this summer," she declared. "I'll have to write Helen about all she is missing. I hope she'll feel sorry she isn't at the Shrubberies now,

instead of prancing about those summer resorts."

"I don't believe she's prancing much," commented practical Selma. "She's too proper to prance."

Betsy laughed again, with a confident little ring in her mirth. "Oh, don't you be too sure," she said, gaily. "Helen Bond changed a whole lot before she went away and you don't know how lively she may come to be yet."

Selma sniffed. "I guess she isn't in any danger of getting too lively," she retorted. "We won't have any chance to see her this year, though, so we won't fuss over it. Let's go play croquet now. The yard's nice and shady."

Betsy was in no mood for pastimes. She preferred something more active than croquet. "Let's go tell Mother about the lessons," she proposed. "We've told your mother, you know. And we can stop in at Simpson's on the way. Emma Clara hasn't heard about Mr. MacTavish's offer yet."

"We can see if she's got any orders, too," agreed Selma, finding pleasure in accomplishing two errands at once.

They found Emma Clara at home, deep in fashion plates and magazine patterns. Her pretty face was flushed and she was much agitated. "I've four orders for party frocks from the McSwiggins down at the mill," she told them with a perplexed wrinkle between her anxious eyes. "They want this cheap pink silk and trashy lace, and I can't make them see how horrid it is. They just will have them. I tried to make them get pink organdie and wash tulle, but they simply turned up their noses at that."

Betsy laughed and then looked serious. "I shouldn't make the silk dresses at all," she declared. "You ought to let them understand that you're a better class dressmaker than that. It's coming down to their level, and I shouldn't do it."

"But they will go to someone else and have their pink silks if Emma Clara doesn't make them," put in Selma, anxiously. "She can't start in to teach the whole town to dress stylish, like she does. You do it, Emma Clara, and never mind Betsy. The money is as good for the hospital as if they'd got plain lawn."

"That's it," exclaimed poor Emma Clara. "I don't dare turn away the money. I may not get many to do, you know, and I have so little to give otherwise. I suppose I'll have to begin on them," and she sighed deeply, taking up a fashion sheet that was marked with a smudge of pencil. "They've chosen their pattern, so that's settled. Here goes, then, for the hospital."

She got out her scissors and the flimsy pink silk, and laid out pins and needles and thread. "You two had better go along," she warned them. "I'm cross as two sticks now, and I won't talk while I'm on the cutting-out. The McSwiggins are in a hurry, of course."

They were at the door when she called after them, with her face bent over her implements: "Tell your mother that Dr. Stanton had another donation of fifty dollars this morning, from a rich patient at the Titusville Hotel," and then she went on industriously pinning the pattern on the pink silk, while the two girls hurried off with the joyful news.

Betsy was uplifted. "We'll soon have enough at this rate," she declared. "That makes five hundred dollars, and we've just begun."

"They can't keep on that way, though," said Selma slowly. "Father says we haven't much money here in town. Wasn't it funny that Emma Clara heard about the donation first of anybody? I wonder how she——"

"Oh, she must have seen the doctor on the road, or somewhere," broke in Betsy, who was not burdened by any tendency toward gossip. "Those McSwiggins, though, might want lessons. They like fancy things—they will have their pink silks—and so, we ought to educate them up to a better sort of fancy things, like music."

Selma sighed. She did not like the prospect of the ambitious McSwiggins, but she knew Betsy too well by this time to try to obstruct her path of duty. "We won't go today, though," she said firmly. "I'm going straight home as soon as I see your mother, and I'll practice those first scales a bit. I'm pretty rusty, I guess."

She was as good as her word, for, after a brief yet delightful conference in the summer house, where Mrs. Hale's praise was gratefully accepted, Selma took herself off, leaving Betsy a whole hour of unoccupied time

before luncheon. "If mother weren't so busy with those proofs," she thought. "We could talk about things. If Phil hadn't taken Mac off, I'd teach him a trick or something. I just can't settle down to anything this morning."

Then she thought of all sorts of things that had any connection with the paramount interest of her present day. She wondered if Mr. Si Myers would be cured before the hospital was ready for him here, and her mind slipped on to Miss Willie Welch and her mysterious fairy palace, as Betsy called it to herself. "I'd love to see it again," she thought.

The more she thought of it, the stronger her desire grew, and so she slipped out and over the hill to the lonely house, which stood apart from the clustering village houses. "I'll just go to the gate and stop for a tiny minute," Betsy told herself. "I don't want to go prying about while Miss Willie's away. I'm sure she wouldn't like it."

But when she got to the open gate, the lure was too strong again. She softly stepped inside, as though afraid of disturbing the noon shadows that lay sleeping on the grass.

"I'll go as far as that stone," she said, stepping lightly over some straggling flowers, toward a big gray boulder, which caught a shaft of sunlight on its top. "Perhaps I can sit down. It will be a good high place to look about—oh, it's a sun-dial! How sweet!"

It was more beautiful than Betsy knew. The spot would have won the most critical, though the village taste found nothing desirable there. The rough gray boulder-dial with its circling flower border was backgrounded against the dense green of yew and arbor-vitæ on its northern side, while the tall, straight poplars and sweeping elms about it were carefully clipped away in places to keep the dial top always in a shaft of sunshine. Flowers rioted among the grass. Tall ferns grew in corners. Vines trailed everywhere. Everywhere there was a sense of hidden beauties, of undiscovered charms, that enraptured Betsy as she gazed.

"Oh, how lovely it is!" she said aloud. "It's so—so wild and so lovely! I wish I could see it all."

"And why not, young Miss?" asked a crisp voice that seemed familiar. "Why not look as much as you please?"

CHAPTER VII

Miss Willie's Inner Courtyard

BETSY faced about with a great start. "Oh, Miss Willie!" she cried in confusion, "I didn't know you were here. I thought——"

She stopped, for it seemed worse to say that she had come spying about in Miss Willie's absence than to have come for a call by herself. "I hope you don't mind," she ended lamely. "It's so very beautiful, and I was only coming as far as the gate, but it looked so mysterious and sort of haunting, I just couldn't stop. So I came in."

Miss Willie was looking at her with a strange expression. "You love it?" she asked with an intensity that Betsy found disconcerting.

"Yes, I love it," she replied mechanically. She was thinking that Miss Willie looked very pale and thin, now that she saw her quite close. "I've never seen any place just like it, you see."

Miss Willie looked about with a sigh. "No, there is no place just like it, I think," she admitted. "But do you not find it overgrown and weedy?"

Betsy, looking about her again, became enthusiastic. She forgot Miss Willie's queerness and pale looks. "Oh, no indeed," she answered warmly. "It's perfectly lovely. It's not a bit too flower-y and vine-y. I love it that way."

Miss Willie nodded thoughtfully. "You echo my sentiments," she said in the same earnest tone. "Selma, however, thought differently, did she not?"

Betsy started. "Oh, you were here then?" she murmured trying to recall what had been said on Saturday afternoon, but failing. "We thought you had gone away. We didn't know——"

Miss Willie saw her embarrassment. "Never mind, young Miss," she said, with her odd, bright manner coming upon her again. "You, at least, need feel no concern. Your words were very flattering to my poor abode—very flattering indeed. I liked the idea of the Nickleman in my well, all frog-like and

croaking and dripping water. Yes, on the whole, I preferred your speech to that of the village child."

She stopped for so long that Betsy had begun to frame a farewell speech, but she did not get through with it, for in the midst of it, Miss Willie turned, and beckoning her to follow, she walked swiftly to the house, where she flung open the wide, low door.

"Enter," she said graciously. "I welcome you to my home."

Betsy was recovering herself, and she liked the quaint courtesy of Miss Willie's speech. It was like the old romances come to life. She walked into the dim hallway with a pleasant sense of entering into a land of fairy, for the same unusual taste that draped the garden with vines and wild flowers had spent itself here in lace-like draperies and silky curtainings.

The hall was wide and low, and opened by a wide archway into a dim, spacious room, where the sunshine barely struggled through the sumptuously veiled windows. Luxurious chairs and inviting couches, with a desk or two of inlaid wood, made most of the furnish-

ing, though in the hall an elaborately carved spinet stood in the corner by the winding stair. Everything was thick with silken covers or hung with silken drapery. The windows had three lacy layers of screening curtains, while the walls were almost covered by tapestries and delicate, old-fashioned water colors.

"Oh," said Betsy, entirely unprepared for such sumptuousness. "How—how *sweet!*"

'You love it?" demanded Miss Willie again, but this time she smiled and her bright eyes softened.

Betsy was drinking the wealth of color and texture with an eager eye. "It's exactly like the sun-dial place outside," she said, thinking aloud. "All green and filmy, with little bits of blue and pink and yellow, like the flowers in the sun."

Miss Willie smiled. With her brown, delicate hand she patted Betsy's shoulder daintily. "You will now please to count yourself one of my best friends," she said brightly. "We have tastes in common, I see. No villager would have said that. Now, let us begin our friendship," and she waved

Betsy to a small chair by a little couch, where she herself sank down as though exhausted.

Betsy's eyes were very busy with the luxurious room, and she was wondering why Selma should have told her that Miss Willie was rather poor. No one save a very rich person, she thought, could have such a room. Almost as though answering her thought, Miss Willie spoke.

"I keep this to myself," she said with a glance about her that lingered lovingly on each nook and corner. "I do not show it to any who do not like my garden. No one here does like my garden, and so they see only the outer courtyard of my domain. That is where I expected to receive you and Selma when you came. But I was feeling very—well, to confess it, very ill and weak on Saturday when I heard your voices, and I could not bear the idea of chatting with young misses. I was too weak, to tell the truth. I gained a truer knowledge, however, than I ever could by a whole afternoon's talk with you both. Selma's neat soul revolts from my untidy garden, while you—you gave me a Nickleman for my well. I thank you."

She bowed so gravely that Betsy felt she must rise and curtsy, and she would have made up a defense for Selma had Miss Willie permitted, but there her hostess was peremptory. "Say no word of excuse, please," she said decisively. "It is undignified to try to excuse our friends. Selma has excellent traits that you, no doubt, lack. We will not discuss it. Shall you care to see my library some day? I am too much fatigued to show you my treasures now, but another day."

She rose, evidently suddenly oppressed by sudden pain, and Betsy's sympathetic heart went out to her in her loneliness. "Oh won't you let me stay and rub your head or get you something cool?" she asked with concern in her voice. "You look quite ill. Indeed you do."

Miss Willie waved her offers away with a trembling hand, though her manner was very kind. "I shall win through to my rest shortly," she said, rather unintelligibly to Betsy, who did not know whether she meant she was going to take a nap as soon as Betsy left, or whether she expected to die soon. It was most uncomfortable.

"Please let me do something," Betsy pleaded, hesitating on the threshold of the room. "I'd love to, really I should. Isn't there anything I can do?"

Miss Willie was recovering and the pallor was gone from her face. She bowed again very formally. "I am restored," she said with a smile. "I shall remember your offerings of aid and may call upon you some day. Now I must show you the outer courtyard where I receive Selmas and their kind."

She led the way across the hall to the room beyond into which the side door from the garden opened. It had ingrain rugs and cheap mission furniture in it, and its windows were curtained with Nottingham lace. A greater contrast could hardly have been accomplished under the same roof. She looked at Betsy with the mocking light of triumph in her brown eyes.

"I give each according to his deserts, you see," she smiled. "I keep the door to my own room locked and the woman who does my cleaning, when I am here, thinks they are store-rooms. But," and her face clouded, "they are a hard task to take care of some-

times. Perhaps one may pay too heavily for a sense of humor."

Betsy did not quite understand her now, and besides she heard the clock striking one from the church on the back road. "Oh, it's quite past luncheon time," she exclaimed. "I shall have to say good-bye, and thank you for letting me in—really in, and not just in the outer courtyard," and she smiled up in Miss Willie's face as she dropped another curtsy. She felt that she was indeed to be one of Miss Willie's friends, since she had seen that bare reception room across the hall.

Miss Willie shook hands with her at parting, but she did not go out with her. "I am not desirous of any of my outer-court guests today," she said. "So I shall not let the villagers see me yet."

Betsy had a flash of understanding. "I shall tell no one—except of course Mother, who never tells," she promised eagerly. "I'll say nothing to Selma about it."

She thought that Miss Willie seemed pleased, and she ran off over the hill again with a happy sense of something important having happened. "I'll go there again as

soon as I think she'd like to see people," she said to herself as she reached the flag-path gate. Then she suddenly paused with her hand on the latch. "I never said one word to her about the hospital," she thought with swift regret. "She hasn't heard a word of it if she's been there by herself since Friday. Oh, dear, how stupid of me! I'll have to make up for it, though. I'll go over late this afternoon with some wild flowers, and then I'll tell her about it."

She was so absorbed in her planning that she was rather later than ever and when she came to the table, her mother was almost finished. She was going out, she told Betsy, to a woman's meeting in the next little town. Mrs. Townsend had telephoned over to tell her that she would bring the car for her at two precisely, and, as Mrs. Hale had to dress, there was no chance for private talk about fairy palaces, or Nicklemen, or such like.

Betsy ate her lunch, waving a farewell to her mother with her napkin as she finished the last morsel. "I'll tell her about it when she comes back," she thought as she went indoors. "She'll be back before very late."

Things seldom turn out just as we plan them, however, and before Mrs. Hale returned, so many things had happened that Betsy's story was quite different from the one she had started with. It had two important additions.

Philip contributed the first.

He came rushing in, Mac barking at his heels, as she was settling down to finish hemming some towels for the Sewing Class. "What do you think?" he called breathlessly. "The Giant's going to give two shows for us tomorrow afternoon and night too. Isn't that great?"

Betsy was delighted at the swiftness with which things were moving, but she had such a mine of secret mystery in her own breast that she could not be entirely her own direct, eager self. "How nice," she said as heartily as she could. Scotch giants were all very well in their way, but everyone could see Mr. MacTavers, while only a few could enter fairyland at pleasure.

Philip looked at her critically. "You said that just like Selma," he commented suspiciously. "What's up? Don't you care for

giants any more? You were daffy over seeing him yesterday."

Betsy tried to defend herself, but he ignored her in his budget of news "The Snake Charmer is well and is going to give a show, too," he told her. "I tell you, Doc Stanton is curing them up right lively. Mrs. Delaney says they're crazy over him down there. They're going to move on next Friday, and the elephant man is to stay with Mrs. Delaney till he's quite well. He's the only one who was badly crumpled up, you know."

Betsy was interested now. "Who is going to take care of his elephant?" she asked. "I should think they'd have a hard time to get an elephant driver. Most elephants are in the Zoo——"

"Oh, they'll manage, I guess," Philip replied easily. It was plain his mind was not on the needs of the elephants. "And who do you suppose is going to chip in for the hospital fund? You'll never guess, though."

"Then tell me," commanded Betsy, eagerly. The mention of the hospital set her eyes shining. She leaned forward, hanging on his words.

"Miss Willie Welch has promised us that old house of hers on the Town Road," said he, gleeful at the expression on Betsy's vivid face. "It's a good big one, and can be fixed up fine, Doc says. How's that for a starter?"

Betsy could find no words. "I didn't know—How in the world—" she began.

Philip enjoyed her amazement. "Selma said she wasn't home, but I saw that the roses on that big bush by the well had all been picked yesterday when I went by," he went on triumphantly. "So I just mosied in and found her out there by the sun-dial, behind the yew trees. She wasn't any too delighted at first, for she didn't want people to know she was home—'didn't want to be annoyed,' she said. She——"

Betsy could not restrain herself. "I didn't know you ever went there," she cried reproachfully. "You never told me."

Philip grinned. "Isn't my fault," he parried. "It's Miss Willie's little way. If you went there, she'd expect you to keep mum, too. She's a stickler for privacy, you see. But she's a trump all the same."

Betsy had no answer to this. Her own

visit to the inner sanctuary was too recent to leave her room for argument. She wondered how many times Philip had been there and which side of the house had been his lot.

"She's given it slap off," he boasted. "And on the day the hospital is opened, she'll take the very best room they have and pay for it right along till she's cured. That's going some, isn't it!"

Betsy tried to stop him as he was moving off. She wanted to ask many questions, but she could not keep him. "I've got to get those cussed logarithms off the hooks," he told her. "There's a ball game in the big field at three o'clock, so I can't blather any longer. See you tomorrow for sure. Be ready on the jump at two-thirty."

Betsy looked after him with a tinge of regret. Somehow she felt that she was taking a far back seat with Philip since the hospital scheme had become popular. "He doesn't care a snap," she thought. "He goes and does things by himself all the time now. I suppose boys are like that."

She frowned at her hemming, and she sighed as she thought of the changes in Emma

Clara, too, who was now so absorbed in the McSwiggin's party dresses that she had no time for other things.

"Emma Clara is very grown-up, after all," she thought reluctantly. "Selma was pretty nearly right, I'm afraid. There isn't anyone who is very diverting this afternoon. I'd like to go see Mrs. Delaney, but that's not allowed. I believe I'll go write that letter to Helen, and I'll make it a good long one, too."

She sat down to her task in just the right mood, for she was hungry for a patient audience, and as Helen was always eager for letters from Betsy, it was a double incentive to her. She wrote steadily for nearly an hour, and then she laid down her pen with a pleased smile. "She'll like that," she said, glancing at the closely written sheets. "I've told her every single thing we've done and said for a week. I didn't dream I had so much to say."

She was sticking the stamp on the envelope when Selma came in. She, too, had news to tell. Everyone seemed to be full of news. Selma's news was of a sort that could be told openly.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. MacTavers Gives a Show

"THERE'S a good seat," said Philip. "You can slip in there, and I'll camp out with the fellows at the back."

Betsy shook her head very decidedly. She had not come to the Scotch giant's show to sit by herself. She had expected to particularly enjoy the Scotch flavor of Mr. MacTavers' performance with Philip, whose likings for the canny race were as strong as her own. She had been rather glad that Selma was to go at night with her mother's small party. Selma did not care very much for the Scotch dialect that was so dear to the two admirers of "St. Valentine's Day."

"I don't want to sit by myself," she protested in an undertone. "I'd rather be farther back, so we can be together."

Philip was entirely masculine and he appeared flattered. "All right," he replied,

leading the way to a couple of chairs some rows behind. "The place is small enough to hear everything, anyway. Jiminy, there's the curtain going up already!"

They had barely time to squeeze in before a very stout lady and a portly companion when the curtain ran up in a slow and jerky manner, while an approving murmur ran about the small tent.

"There he is!" whispered Philip proudly. "Isn't he the Scotchest thing you ever saw?"

Mr. MacTavers was standing with his arms folded, looking out over his audience with the imperturbable calm of a true Highlander. His ruddy hair was topped by a Highland bonnet and his brawny legs showed brown and muscular between the hem of his kilts and the top of his low stockings. He was very tall indeed—so tall that Betsy found him oppressive. "I think he's too big," she whispered uneasily to Philip, who paid no attention to her. "I wish he wouldn't look right at me," she thought, staring back at the imposing MacTavers. "Giant's are too big to stare like that."

She was doing the huge Scot an injustice,

for he was not really looking at her at all. The fact was that he was so thoroughly cross-eyed that he seemed to be staring at each individual in the tent, and Betsy was only sharing the feelings of many others when she squirmed under that portentous gaze. Mr. MacTavers was highly valued by the management for this very point, since he was the only cross-eyed giant on the whole circuit.

"And noo," he spoke suddenly in a great husky voice that seemed compounded of the roar of the Highland cataracts and the shifting mists of the Highland fells. "And noo, ladies and gentlemens, I'll gie ye a wee taste of the Hielan' fling. No' that it's may ain choice to begin with, but the music-box is wanted by the management for the show in the next toon the night, and they'll be aff in half an hoor."

A small rustle of applause greeted this first speech, and then, as Mr. MacTavers gravely started the small phonograph preparatory to his dance, a silence fell upon the place that was almost solemn. Betsy thought she had never seen a more businesslike performance than that Highland fling as rendered by the

enormous Scot on the limited platform of the little tent. "I hope it isn't all going to be so sober and serious," she thought, in keen disappointment. "It's almost like going to church."

She did not voice her sentiments to Philip, for she felt sure he would be too loyal to his Scotch friend to be patient with her. So she sat and waited while the phonograph piped on and the great solemn-faced Highlander did his duty by the dance. He seemed as much relieved as she when the last note died away and the rather lukewarm clapping began.

"Noo it's the sword dance," he told them, with more relish. "And it ought to be done by the pipes, but I canna pipe and dance baith mysel', so we'll ha' it with the music-box."

Betsy liked the sword dance infinitely better, for there was a fire in the misleading little gray eyes of the MacTavers as he crossed and re-crossed the little stage, and a decision to the swing of his weapon that was inspiring. When he ended and stood calmly enduring the applause that had warmed to his livelier performance, she clapped very hard indeed.

"I think he's going to be splendid," she said, while the phonograph was being removed, "he's so much more cheerful now."

Philip gave her a withering look. He was glowing with excited admiration and could brook no criticism of his giant. "'Going to be?'" he echoed disdainfully. "Why, he's simply great. You didn't expect him to grin and joke, did you? Why, he's a *Scotchman!*"

Betsy was properly rebuked, and she sat rather silently while the fat lady was ushered in, together with the scales which were to prove her title, and her part of the entertainment began. Madame Titanica, as she was oddly called, was a great contrast to her talented husband, for she was as smiling and dimpled as he was raw-boned and serious. She had a small part, but she did it with great good nature.

First of all, she was weighed. She waddled to the scales and stepped laboriously on, whereupon the giant's husky tones announced triumphantly the interesting fact, "Fower hunner pun, as ye may see for yoursel' if ye'll step up." No one did step up, however, and the fat lady got off the scales very carefully, and prepared for her second act.

"The Lay of the Lady Grissel," announced the giant, taking a tiny pipe from his sporran and fitting it together with great care. "Composed by Madame Titanica her ain sel' and the music writ for it by a noted musician."

Instead of looking at Madame Titanica who had waddled to a position at the front, everybody was intent on MacTavers, as he fitted the little pipe together. It seemed a miracle that his eyes would serve him for such small purposes. But they did. He adjusted the pipe, blew a note or two, and then nodded gravely to the singer. "Noo for it," he whispered in a booming breath that could be heard on the back benches. "Gie it to 'em strong, my lass."

Madame Titanica, thus advised, sang a very long song in a very small voice. It was all about roaming lightly in her native valleys and sporting with the birds and butterflies there. Betsy wondered how she could think of such activities, with all her bulk. Then she bowed and sat down, smiling very much at the liberal applause they gave her. Fat ladies who sang were novelties in sideshows, as Madame Titanica knew very well.

After that MacTavers came out in his strength.

He lifted incredibly heavy bars and balls. He measured himself by the tentpole, showing the amazing height of eight feet six without his enormous shoes. He dropped a half-dollar through his ring, to show the size of his little finger, and altogether, he exhibited a degree of activity that was surprising in one of his great size. The audience grew more and more demonstrative, while Philip swelled with pride.

"There's nothing like a real Highland-man," he said to Betsy, as the solemn MacTavers brought out the bagpipes and began tuning and inflating them. "There isn't another giant that can do anything but loaf about and talk. He's the best ever. He's going with a big show next year."

The skirl of the pipes broke in on the praise of his favorite, and even Philip could not withstand the onslaught of those piercing, shrieking pipes. The tent was filled with their clamor, and uneasy movements ran about the audience whose ear-drums were assailed unmercifully by the wild strains that sounded

so penetrating in that small enclosure. Out on the free hills MacTavers might have held his hearers, but indoors he struck them deaf with the clamor.

"Oh, oh!" breathed Betsy, stuffing her fingers into her ears. She was shocked at the moanings and groanings that came from the much-lauded bagpipes. She had read about them, and loved them so in print, that she felt she could not endure both her own disappointment and the howlings of the piercing music.

"Do let's go out," she whispered to Philip imploringly under cover of the noise. "They're so terribly loud!"

He cast one withering glance at her and took up his hat. "I thought you liked them," he retorted fiercely. "You're always going over those parts about the strains of the pipes echoing among the hills and that sort of thing. I didn't know you were such a Sassenach as all that."

Betsy had risen slightly, but now she dropped back into her chair. Philip was dearer to her than her own ear-drums, and she could not bear his contempt. "So I did

like them in the books," she confessed, with a lift of her brown head, "but I didn't know they howled like that. The tent's too small, anyway. Maybe I'd like them perfectly well if I'd heard them out of doors, like they belong. I'll stop here for a while and see—oh, there, he's stopping, and the people are all getting up. What's happening now?"

Philip snorted. "You seem to be pretty silly today," he told her with engaging frankness. "Nothing's happening. The show's over. Come along if you want to meet Mr. MacTavers. Push right after me and don't get lost."

Betsy resented his suggestion of her inability to take care of herself. "I'm not a baby, even if I don't just adore bagpipes in my very ear," she thought resentfully, as she followed him through the crowded aisle to the platform where the giant was standing, solemn and detached, answering the questions put to him by the more venturesome of his audience.

"Na, na. It's nae for the sake of the hospital-place by itsel'," he was saying as they wedged their way nearer. " 'Tis a gude wark, but nane of my ain affair—for I've na

been a sufferer wi' tha ithers. 'Tis for the honor of Caithness, ye ken, that I gie the siller. I winna hae them clown-bodies mis-ca' Caithness, a-sayin' that Caithness canna tak her part in anny gude wark along o'scum fra Ireland or haythen lands abune."

The man he was speaking to laughed. "Well, that's all right, too," he said easily, as he turned away. "Stick up for your own bit of country, I say, and you can't go far wrong. We're much obliged to Caithness, if you put it that way."

The giant welcomed them with deep gravity, and the short ordeal of shaking hands with the towering figure and murmuring some complimentary words up to his looming ear was soon over. Betsy followed Philip out into the sunshine again with a sense of having a wider experience in men and things. Mr. MacTavers' husky voice rang in her ears above the echoes of the bagpipes. " 'Tis for the honor of Caithness," she heard him saying, and she nodded emphatic approval.

"I like your giant tremendously, Phil," she told him, when there was a chance to speak. "He was so cross-eyed at first that

I didn't quite like to look at him, and the bagpipes were too screechy when he started; but I like him now. He's willing to do things for the honor of his country, and I just love that in anyone."

Philip appeared somewhat softened. He, too, had been disappointed in the pipes and deeply cut by Betsy's aversion to them, but her praise of the great MacTavers soothed his hurt. "He's all right," he returned, looking at her more kindly. "I thought you'd get over being so silly. You ought to see him around camp—he's great, I tell you. He's so strong that he can help a lot, and he isn't afraid of himself like most side-shows are. He's great on duty, you know. That's the Scotch of him, I guess."

Betsy nodded. She was beginning to feel a deep interest in MacTavers, now that his disconcerting eyes were not upon her. The speech about Caithness had shown her the kindred spirit in the widely differing natures. "Miss Willie gave the house because she loved this place," she broke out, thinking aloud. "And Squire Worthington and all the others gave their money, too. Mr. MacTavers

didn't seem as though he liked to give away the silver, but he did it for Caithness. Loving your country makes you do kind and generous things, doesn't it, Phil?"

"Sure," responded Philip, heartily. He looked at her now with all the old friendly light in his eyes, and a new gleam of admiration mingled with the old.

"You've got it this time. That's why this hospital is going to be put through in spite of all the stingy old codgers. They're not going to let Highville get ahead of us. That's what is going to fetch it."

Betsy felt that this was not the highest form of patriotism, though she had not words to express her meaning. They were on the crest of the Town Road now, looking down toward the Cross-roads and she knew that the flag was there which spoke of better things, of generosity without petty rivalry, of self-denial without protest, of eager, whole-souled offerings that had no taint of self-seeking. All this she felt but could not voice. And, in spite of Philip's words, she knew that he felt so too. That was why she could speak as she had spoken just a moment ago.

They had walked very slowly and by the longer way about in order to catch a glimpse of the portion of the circus which was going over to Plumstead for the evening's performance. They caught a limited view of the train of wagons, and Philip, who was familiar with them all, pointed out the snake-charmer's willowy figure on the top of the second wagon. "She made a big splurge about giving her show with MacTavers, but she pretended she had to go with the troupe tonight," he said disdainfully. "She's a regular slacker—that's what she is."

Betsy had more leniency for the disappointing artist. "Perhaps she did have to go," she argued. "The manager may have made her."

"The manager is a dub," declared Philip gloomily. "He talks a lot about eternal gratitude, but he's not offered to give a benefit here, like he ought. The giant is the only one of the whole lot who has done anything."

"That's because he's Scotch, and Scotch people are religious and do their duty," explained Betsy, who had a clearer view of

the national character of the clans as shown by books than in actual life.

They went on talking earnestly, as was their wont. They were given to much discussion when they were together and they talked matters over more thoroughly with one another than with any others. They had much to speak of now, and while the rest of the village was scurrying home toward their early suppers, they loitered along the pleasant Town Road, which was also the main road, talking of Miss Willie's gift—though they never mentioned their separate visits to her home—and of the probable amount of Mr. MacTavers' donation.

"He's going to let me take it to the Squire," Philip told her proudly. "He says he 'canna be fashed wi' sic-like triflin' matters.' "

Betsy's eyes were on the peaceful scene before her. A dozing horse at the hitching-post by Higbee's store and an old man with a cane tapping the sidewalk by Worthington's white house were all the signs of life about the place. The sun filtered down through the dense old trees, making little pools of light upon the dusty highway. All was tranquil and serene.

"I'd love—" she began, but she never had time to say what it was she would love, for around the corner, past the dozing horse came a couple of white-faced boys, screaming.

In a second the tranquillity was gone. The horse woke and bolted, the old man hobbled swiftly behind the nearest big tree, while the boys fled screaming up the road, too frightened to take shelter for themselves.

Betsy and Philip were at the old ruined shop by this time and they stood paralyzed at the suddenness of it all. Staring down toward the corner to see what it was the terrified boys and horse were fleeing from, they caught a vision of a great, heaving, gray body and a shaggy brown object in front of it. Then the screams of the frightened boys grew suddenly clear in their ears.

"The circus is broke loose!" they screamed. "The elephant's coming!"

CHAPTER IX

Betsy Puts Herself in Her Place

"CLIMB up here," cried Philip, pushing Betsy up the crumbling stair which led to the fragment of an upper story. "Quick, *quick!*"

Betsy obeyed with soldier-like promptness. The stair was weak and rotten, but she was light and fleet, and she gained the upper landing in a flash.

"You, too," she breathed, stretching out her hand, but he did not follow.

"Wait," he shot out, and then he turned to face the peril that was coming so swiftly.

Betsy caught her lower lip between her teeth and did not cry out, as the great dun-colored mass heaved nearer. Steadying herself by the frail fragment of rotting railing, she saw beneath her in the roadway a sight that chilled her to the core. The big brown bear, with all his tiredness gone, was loping along through the flicker of sunshine, with the

terrier yapping cheerfully by his side, while behind loomed the great form of the elephant with trunk raised high and great ears flapping!

"Oh, Philip, come!" she cried, in a panic for him down there at the foot of the stair. "Do——"

He did not even look back at her. He made a gesture with his hand, silencing her impatiently, and then, as the big bear loped toward the cool shelter of the dense trees of the ruin, he took a step forward, as though to halt the creature's progress. "Get out of here!" he cried sternly, though his face was very white. "Go on! Shoo!"

Betsy would have laughed if she had not been so frightened, for, at Philip's shout of command, the big, shaggy creature turned, halted, dropped to a sitting posture and waved its huge paws in the mildest manner in the world. The terrier sat down, too, panting, with red tongue quivering joyously. It looked quite as though they welcomed the interruption of their escapade.

The elephant, too, had paused for a moment. Betsy could just see the waving tip of the sinuous gray trunk as it swayed uncertainly to and fro beyond the sheltering branches.

It was a strange moment.

Betsy, staring down through the leafy branches, saw the bear, the terrier and Philip in one little motionless group, while just behind them, out in the sunny roadway, was the great heaving body of the elephant, like a ship riding at anchor.

Suddenly the anchor snapped and the scene changed.

"Go on!" cried Philip, waving commandingly to the bear. "Go on, I say!"

Whether it was the sound of his voice, or the snapping of a twig as he stamped his foot, or whether the elephant's moment of indecision was over, Betsy had no means of knowing, but whatever it was with a sudden movement, the elephant swung his trunk high again, and swung heavily forward.

Like a flash the bear was on its feet and, turning to the road once more, it loped swiftly onward, with its attendant terrier yapping by its side.

"Oh!" breathed Betsy in relief, and then she said "Oh!" again in a very different tone, for the elephant, instead of pursuing the two charges he had been herding along the high-

way, turned to the tree-bowered ruin, and made straight for Philip.

It all happened so swiftly that she hardly saw how it was done. She caught the flash of the gray trunk, the sound of the heavy trampling of soft feet beneath her shelter. She saw Philip suddenly swung up in the air, and she screamed out in terror at that sight. Forgetting her own fears, she fled down the stair. If she could not save Philip, she would at least be near him at the end.

But her feet had barely touched the stair when she saw again the sweep of that strong gray trunk once again in the air above her head. Philip was held firmly about the waist, and as the great trunk swept him upward this time, it heaved him backward and seated him gently and firmly on the great wide neck of the monster.

"Oh!" gasped Betsy for the third time, and she sank into a crumpled heap on the grass at the foot of the stair.

The relief of seeing Philip alive and comparatively safe, instead of finding him lifeless and mangled by that ferocious beast, was too much for her, and for the first time in her life she fainted quite away.

What happened while she was in the swoon; how the elephant carried Philip off safely back to the encampment in the meadow, all the while carefully herding the truant bear; how Jimmy Delaney met them there at the entrance and took them inside, telling Philip the needful words of command to make his strange charger kneel and allow him to dismount; how the whole thing had come about through the absence of the troupe in Plumstead and the consequent scarcity of hands, which left the bear supperless and restless, and which ended in a broken chain for bruin and snapped picket-ropes for the careful elephant, who had merely broken away to herd the runaway bear back to its station—all this was told her by Philip himself as soon as she was able to hear it.

Emma Clara told her the other part—about her own part, in the next half hour. Emma Clara had been alarmed by seeing the elephant and bear pass the Simpson place and had followed hard in their wake, hoping to reach Higbee's telephone in order to warn the rest of the village before the intruders had reached the Town Road. She had been too

late, of course, for the screaming boys had already spread the alarm all along their way, and since everyone was rushing to their front windows to see what the commotion meant, no one would answer the operator's call.

"And so I came out to see what was going on," Emma Clara said, as she was helping Betsy to make herself comfortable in the long chair by the summer house. "Dear me, but I was frightened! It looked as though the elephant had killed you—you lay there so white and still. It was a mercy that Dr. Stanton was in town and came right away. We were all so frightened we did not know what to do for you. I think those strange animals upset our common sense."

Betsy nestled down cosily. She was not at all concerned about herself, in spite of the excitement she had caused. She was only stopping there in the long chair because Dr. Stanton, after he had brought her home, had recommended a quiet hour, and she wanted her mother, when she came home from the city, to find her quite as usual. "It's funny enough now," she said, recalling the exciting scene, "but it was terribly scary

when it was happening. I never dreamed I should faint, though. I guess Philip wasn't so wrong about my being a baby, after all."

Emma Clara laughed, too, though she defended her friend stoutly. "You weren't a baby at all," she declared warmly. "Anyone would have been frightened by a big bear and an elephant, and perhaps a whole menagerie to come after. You dashed down stairs to help Philip, and that was quite brave enough, I think."

Betsy was thinking now of the heroic figure she might have cut. "I wish I'd kept my wits about me," she said rather impatiently. "I might have known that bear was tame, and anyone with half an eye could have seen that the elephant was simply taking the bear along home out of harm's way. I ought to have been alongside of Philip, and the two of us could have——"

Emma Clara interrupted good naturedly. "It was better the way it happened," she said, taking up her book. "The elephant took the bear home safely and Philip had a ride. It was quite brave enough of you to come to his aid when you did. Can't you see

that the more frightened you were, the braver it was to leap down to help him as you did?"

Betsy could not get much satisfaction out of this view of the case. "It was all pretty silly, I think," she retorted, as she watched Emma Clara settle herself in her chair and open the book. "It might have been very different. And then she lay back, listening only with one ear to the story that her friend read to her.

Her mind was filled with shifting pictures of the happenings of the past few days, and her face grew more and more serious as she saw them pass in slow review. There were two sets of pictures—one was all glorious and victorious; and these were the visions she had made of her own actions, while that flood of patriotism surged high within her. The other panorama unrolled before her reluctant eyes in all the prosaic outlines of reality; and these were the actual happenings, revealed now in all the bareness of unromantic everyday light.

"I've been a great goose," she thought, with a saving touch of humor at her own pretensions. "I thought I was going to do

it all—waking them up about the hospital and starting them to really *want* it. But I've hardly done a thing. I've talked a good bit, and yet, if Philip hadn't taken hold like he did, and if Selma hadn't helped me with the lists and the music pupils, I don't believe I'd have amounted to a row of pins."

This conclusion sank slowly deep into her mind, as she lay back quietly watching the breeze stirring the little curls on Emma Clara's white neck. "No," she thought, reluctantly, "I really haven't done anything at all myself. I got Mother and Emma Clara to begin the whole thing, and then Selma and Philip kept me going." She sighed as she realized her real position in the affair. "Even with Miss Willie Welch I was too slow. I suppose I'm not made for public life. I did very well with the coffee premiums and all that, for they were 'private interests', as Mother calls them. No, I'm not made for public life and I just shan't be silly enough to ever think so again. I'll just help the others."

Having thus disposed of her own weakness, and settled her part in the campaign, she turned her attention to the story and began

to enjoy herself with characteristic thoroughness. Whatever Betsy did, she did with her whole heart.

When the story was finished and the hour of rest over, she sat up briskly.

"If you want me to help overcast seams or run errands for you, I'll be very glad," she said eagerly. "I'm going to help all I can now, and I think it will be a good plan to do the little things no one else wants to do."

"You'd best stay out here till your mother comes back," Emma Clara advised as she gathered up her things, preparatory to going. "You will be all the better for the rest, even though you don't really need it, perhaps. I'll be over after supper, as I want to see your mother. Don't you think about sewing or anything just now. There's plenty of time to talk about that tomorrow."

She turned to look up the road to the village as she spoke, and she motioned to the figure appearing over the brow of the long slope.

"You'll have something to occupy your time now," she said with a smile. "Selma will keep you company for a while at least. I'll

run, for I'm rather late, I think. Good-bye until after supper," and with a nod and wave of the hand she went down the gravel walk and out the gate.

Selma came in with a quicker step than usual. Her face was pink and she evidently had something on the tip of her tongue.

CHAPTER X

Mrs. Bond's Offer and What Came of It

SELMA'S face was rosy with excitement. She evidently had something to tell well worth hearing. "You'll never guess," she breathed importantly.

Betsy pushed her into the low chair by the table and flung herself into the seat opposite.

"Now then," she commanded, "tell me every single thing you have to tell, and I'll tell you about the elephant afterward."

Selma was entirely content with either topic. She opened her mouth with a click. "Mrs. Bond came about half an hour ago in the big gray limousine, and she's been talking a blue streak to father ever since. She asked him all about the hospital—what Dr. Stanton was going to do for it, and what everyone had given, and who had promised to keep on helping, and, oh, everything you can think of. I was in the yard under the

tree, hemming dish-towels for Mother, and I heard almost every word."

Betsy broke in, an anxious pucker beginning to show between her eyes. "But, perhaps, you oughtn't to have listened," she said doubtfully. "They may not have wanted you to hear what——"

Selma waved away her doubts with a calm hand. "They knew I was there because I spoke to Mrs. Bond when she came in, and she told me Helen was getting stronger—so, you see, they knew perfectly well I was there all the time. Besides, they talked loud enough to wake the dead. They didn't care who heard them. It was perfectly right to listen. Mrs. Bond said she wanted to make her offer to the public at once, and I was part of the public, wasn't I?"

Betsy's face cleared a bit, though it was still dubious. She was too eager to hear the news, however, to be very critical. "What was it she offered?" she asked.

Selma paused to let her next words sink deep.

"She wanted him to tell everybody, *everybody*, that she was going to do her share

toward the hospital. She would have given a lot of ground for it if Miss Willie hadn't given that house; but as she can't give ground, she'll give money. She'll give just twice as much as all the rest of us give altogether."

Betsy could not keep from raptures. "Oh, how sweet of her!" she cried ardently. "How perfectly sweet of her to do such a splendid thing."

"It's for Helen's birthday," broke in Selma, delighted with the effect of her news. "It's a sort of thank-offering for her getting well. Mrs. Bond is to be sent word on the twenty-ninth of July just how much we've got together, and then on the morning of the first of August she'll send the check for twice that amount."

Betsy was on fire with enthusiasm. The generous deed stirred her deeply. She almost forgot her own ten-cent size for a moment, as she saw the future dancing before her. "We'll get a lot together by that time," she prophesied buoyantly. "We'll show her how much we can do, too. By the first of August we'll have a tremendous lot."

"I don't know," replied Selma. "I guess

most people here have given about all they can afford, and the other towns aren't going to help us much. When we get the Giant's money, and what comes from the supper and Mrs. Bean's party, we'll have about all that is coming to us, I guess."

Betsy went swiftly over the mental list of donations which she kept ready for instant reference. "We've been tremendously fortunate so far," she said brightly. "The King's Daughters did more than we dreamed they could, and the Knights of the Golden Cuckoo have promised to fit out the operating room. The twenty-ninth is a long way off, and you don't know what may happen by that time."

"But everyone has done all they can," persisted Selma gently. "Mr. Gaston is to see that the alterations on the house are done, and that's all he can possibly do. Miss Willie won't give any more, and I know Father can't afford another cent. There aren't any summer people here, like some towns have, and so we can't look for extra donations from outsiders. Father told Mrs. Bond that we had about a thousand dollars

so far in money gifts, and I'm pretty sure that we won't have any more than that by the twenty-ninth."

Betsy sighed. "That's not the way to get more, anyway," she said, with a determination not to see Selma's view of it. "We've just got to keep on trying and hoping—that's the only way to accomplish anything. We'll have about two weeks after the supper, and almost anything could happen in two weeks. That circular letter that Dr. Stanton got up did some good, after all," she added happily. "Even if no one else answered it, Mrs. Bond makes up for all that were sent out."

"She didn't say a word about the circular letter," Selma told her briskly, as she paused with one hand on the back of Betsy's chair. "It was your letter to Helen—that long one with pages and pages to it—that brought her over here to see for herself. There had been hospital talk before that had always fizzled out, you know, and she wasn't much interested until Helen began talking it up to her. I forgot to tell you that. Now I must run back or I'll be late for supper.

It's early tonight because of the Giant, you know."

Betsy watched her hurrying off up the road and then she went back and sat down in the long chair, with her lips tightly pressed together and a very severe expression on her face.

"There now, Betsy Hale, I hope that will be a lesson to you," she said with stern emphasis. "You wrote that letter just to fill in time, and you never thought it would amount to a row of pins. And all the while you were rushing about, planning all sorts of great things, thinking you were in the big-flag class. Not one of those great plans came to much, and I hope now that you're quite convinced that you'll do much better in the ten-cent class. It's the little things that nobody else wants that you must do, my dear."

She sat up very straight, thinking very hard, and the more she thought, the more positive she grew that she was fitted only for the very smallest services.

"I'll never try to be anything but a ten-cent size after this," she said and straight-

way she began to revise her future according to this humble rule. She was nothing if not thorough, and by the time she had laid out her course for the next few days there was a succession of small duties and unimportant activities before her that did not look very inviting. But Betsy liked the bare and monotonous aspect of that future.

"Something's bound to come of it, if I can only stick to it," she thought hopefully. "I can't do big things—that's flat—so I'll do the little things with all my might."

And as far as Betsy was concerned, that was the most important effect of Mrs. Bond's offer on her own concerns. It changed the character of the next two weeks entirely for her. It brought with it a passionate sense of unfitness for great endeavors. It woke in her a craving for despised duties. She bought a little ten-cent flag and pinned it on the wall above her bed to keep her down, as she said.

With the village it was very different.

When the news of the generous offer became public, there was general elation among the committees and partisans of the Hospital

Fund. There were boastful prophesies as to what was to be accomplished before the twenty-ninth. Public enthusiasm ran high and public feelings were openly expressed. Great things were looked for, and there were spirited discussions on the store porch and at the Ladies' Aid.

Betsy was delighted when the morning mail brought a fifty dollar check from Mrs. Warren.

She found it very agreeable, too, when Philip hailed her in the garden a little later with "Guess how much?" and she was allowed to peep into the bag that contained the sum of the entertainments by Mr. MacTavers for the benefit of the Hospital Fund.

"Oh, what a lot!" she exclaimed with satisfying fervor. "I didn't think there were so many five-cent pieces in the whole place. How much is it?"

Philip tied up the bag again with a triumphant air. "Twenty-one dollars and five cents," he told her magnificently. "He gave two shows last night and charged fifteen cents for grown-ups. I tell you

She Was Allowed to Peep into the Bag

there's nothing like the Scotch to turn a penny. Those other simps haven't given a single cent, and they were most of them taking medicine from Doc Stanton, for one thing or another. MacTavers is the only white one of the whole lot."

"And you got this, too," said Betsy thoughtfully. "If you hadn't told him about Mr. Gun and Caithness, I don't believe he'd have thought of doing it. You've done such a lot, Phil. What with Miss Willie Welch and the parade and all, I think they ought to give you a medal or something."

Philip faced her in real alarm. "See here, Betsy Hale, you want to drop that," he shot out. "I'd never speak to you again if you started any stuff like that. I'd not stir a finger about the old hospital if—" He broke off at Betsy's laughter. "Well, I mean it," he ended defiantly. "Just you try to start anything like that and you'll see!"

He stalked off indignantly before Betsy could smother her giggles enough to follow without affronting him further by ill-timed

mirth. She heard him slam the gate very hard after him, and with the sound an idea tapped at her brain.

"He ought to get some credit for all he does," she thought warmly. "I'll have to be very careful, though, for he does hate to be praised out loud. He's fought both of the Freeman boys because their mother said he looked like a young Sir Galahad in that Templar rig."

She thought for a good while and then decided that she had found the way.

"I'll wait and see if he does any other good deeds," she said to herself as she went toward the house. "He's simply bound to go on doing fine things and hiding them. I'll find out everything he's done before I——"

She did not say what she was going to do, but she looked very well pleased with herself, and she murmured comfortably, as she put her hand on the latch of the old-fashioned door, "And it's just the sort of little, tiny, teeny thing that I can do."

It was evident that she said nothing about her idea, for no one thought or spoke much

about Philip in the following days. The Supper was prepared for, and its possible receipts counted over and over again by the interested committees and partisans; the few contributions that came in from unexpected sources were posted on the store porch where all might read and rejoice; everyone was busy and hopeful. Mrs. Bond's offer had put new life into the enterprise and the hospital was on everyone's tongue.

"How much is it now?" Betsy would ask Selma every day, for although the returns were posted each night and morning on the store porch, sometimes the Squire had a small donation that had not arrived in time for the semi-daily notice, and Selma always hurried over to the Wee Corner with the glad tidings.

On the morning before the Supper the sum had reached nearly twelve hundred dollars, and interest was at its height. So deeply absorbed was the village in the hospital project that the fact of the departure of the circus was almost unheeded. Some people did go over to Pebble Hill to watch the long caravan winding its way out over the Lime-

kiln Road, and the small boys of the surrounding farms were swarming along the route of the big red wagons, as eager and interested as ever; but the village took no official notice of the event.

Betsy and Selma were among the few who took a last look at the cavalcade as it wound its way among the trees and hedges of the sunny landscape. The red wagons glinted in the morning light and the gray heaving backs of the elephants showed above the hedgerows.

Selma shook her head disapprovingly at the moving line. "Such selfish things as they are!" she exclaimed with as much scorn in her soft tones as she could muster. "I don't wonder they are sneaking off without any music or anything. I hope they do feel a bit ashamed—after all of Dr. Stanton's kindness to them."

Betsy felt quite as strongly as her friend, but it was her way to see both sides to the question. "Perhaps they really are too poor to give anything," she said thoughtfully. "They may want to, but they have to have food and stuff for the animals, and

pay for hand-bills and all that, or they'd starve. They didn't make anything in Highville and they had to spend money right along for things to eat, you know. People can't always give what they'd like. I know we used to feel——"

"They could give something if they really wanted to," declared Selma, who knew nothing of the pinch of poverty, and, like many others, was very certain of her own opinions. "It's just stinginess, and I think it's disgusting. I'm glad they're gone."

"They did some good, anyway, for they started the hospital," Betsy retorted. She did not like the behavior of the circus people any more than Selma, but her own experience had taught her to judge others with a wider charity than the prosperous Squire's daughter would ever know.

She turned homeward with the other watchers as the tail of the procession disappeared into the hollow by West's woods, linking her arm in Selma's as they went down the rough pathway toward the village. The two girls were very silent as they went along, and it was only at the corner where

their paths separated that the silence was broken.

Betsy had forgotten the faulty present in a rosy vision of the future.

"Oh, I do hope we make a tremendous lot at the Supper tonight," she burst out impulsively.

Selma looked doubtful, but made no direct answer.

"I'll meet you at six *exactly*," she flung over her shoulder. "We must be on time, for there'll be an awful crowd."

CHAPTER XI

Doubts and Discouragements

THE Supper was a great disappointment.

"It doesn't do to look for so much, I guess," Betsy said sadly when it was all over and she was gathering up her belongings, while her mother waited for her on a camp-chair nearby, and Selma sat resignedly watching the whole disordered scene.

It was past ten o'clock, and the crowd had gone some half hour ago. The tables were dismantled, the aids had shed their pretty caps and aprons and were busy sorting over the jumbled heaps of crumpled linen, or searching for mislaid articles in the usual frantic way. The wide lawn was strewn with scraps of paper and other festive litter, and the flare of the flickering torches lit up the remnants of toy balloons, and burnt-out paper lanterns that still clung to tree-twigs or hung from wires, like ghosts of the

departed festival. Betsy, with her bundle complete, glanced about her with a sigh.

"It looks like I feel," she told Selma whimsically. "Sort of gone-and-done-for, you know. Isn't it different from that six-o'clock feeling we had?"

Selma nodded. She did not seem to consider it worth while to speak.

"Everything was *so* joyful at six," Betsy went on, tying her bundle with a jerk. "It didn't seem possible that we'd feel so different at ten. And we all worked dreadfully hard," she ended with a tired sigh.

Selma from her bench spoke resentfully. "I think you were perfectly silly to stick over that dish-pan all the time, when you ought to have been going about with the candy trays," she said. "Mrs. Giles didn't like it much, I can tell you. She said that you'd have sold twice as much as Jennie Parsons, and that Jennie was a perfectly good dish-washer, but a mighty poor candy seller. I don't see what got into you."

Poor Betsy had no answer. She was thinking how hot the water had been and how sticky the many dishes had proved.

And it was all in vain—her sacrifice to her new ten-cent rule! She had resolutely put herself in the meanest place, refusing the pleasanter duties, and nothing had come of it. The Supper, instead of being the great success they had all hoped, was a financial failure. They had not made even the usual amount.

"There were plenty of people here," went on Selma in calm displeasure. "I don't think there were ever more people at any Supper we ever had, but they were poor spenders. Seventy dollars for everything is a mighty poor showing. I guess Mrs. Bond won't have to pay very high for the rest of it—the Garden Party and all that. We're about done now."

It was a dark moment for Betsy—that minute of defeat amongst the flaring torches and burnt-out lanterns. She knew that she had been mistaken this time in her zeal for the lowliest place, but she was not of the stuff that weakly succumbs to the first disaster.

"Perhaps I might have done better with the trays than at the dish-pan," she acknowl-

edged with ready common sense. "I didn't think of it, that's all, and Mrs. Giles didn't say anything to me about it. But I won't believe that we aren't going to have any more good luck with the Hospital Fund. We'll just have to try all the harder."

Selma interrupted with a tired yawn. "Don't argue about it now," she said listlessly. "I've had enough for tonight, if you haven't. Come along, for your mother's been waiting an age and she's perfectly sick of it, I'm sure."

Betsy went slowly at her bidding. She was very quiet, even after she had parted from Selma and the others and was walking home through the starlight with her mother. She was trying to puzzle it out—the whole problem of service and its reward. Why should the circus people get so much and give so little? Why should Dr. Stanton pour out his offerings with such a liberal hand and reap such a slight return? Why should her own ardent efforts meet with such scant success? It was a problem that had puzzled succeeding generations and Betsy shook her head over it and then gave it up.

"I'll just keep on the same, though," she told herself with an uplift of her smooth brown head. I'm not going to be blue over one failure. I was a goose tonight not to ask Mrs. Giles what she wanted me to do, but I'll stick to the ten-cent size for the rest of the time. The next time I'll do better."

Her mother took her silence for despondency, and she slipped a comforting arm about her as they reached the front gate at the Wee Corner.

"Never mind Betsy-girl, we'll do better next time," she said consolingly. "This disappointment will only wake us up the more. There's the Garden Party and a whole week after that. Miss Bond will have a harder time of it than she expected when the twenty-ninth of July comes around.

It was an echo of Betsy's own spirit and it sounded like a prophecy to her. She squeezed the encircling arm gratefully and looked up at the dimly seen face. Her belief in her clever mother was stronger than even her own brave hopes.

"It's bound to be all right, if you say so, Mother dearest," she said with a ring of

relief in her tired voice. "I shan't worry about it a single bit. I'll just know we're going to surprise Mrs. Bond on the twenty-ninth, no matter what anyone says."

She went to bed happier in this belief. She clung to it even when the realities of daylight brought her further news of a disheartening sort. Selma came over bright and early to tell it, and her manner was rather triumphant.

"What did I say, Betsy Hale?" she asked impressively. "I told you that our good luck was gone, didn't I? Mrs. Bean's sick in bed, and they think she's getting some sort of a fever. We'll never have the Garden Party now, you see."

Betsy was glad that she could stick to her hopefulness. She did not stick to it, much to Selma's disgust, and, later in the day she found it was worth while. Doctor Stanton, being called in, pronounced Mrs. Bean's ailment a light case of biliousness and declared that there need be no fear of postponement for the Garden Party. So that small cloud passed, leaving Betsy more stubborn in her hope than ever.

In the days between the Supper and the Garden Party she found need of a good deal of obstinacy in this respect, for Selma saw only the darker side now, and made much of each threatened disaster to the cause. She hurried over to the Wee Corner with every piece of news that came to her, and Betsy's soul was much tried. "Mr. Carter says Miss Willie's house is awfully out of repair," she told Betsy one day. "I don't believe Mr. Gaston will be able to afford to fix it up very nicely after all."

On another afternoon she hailed Betsy from the flag-path gate. "Freemans are going to move tomorrow," she called. Mr. Freeman's sent for them to come to Alton right away. That makes four less at the Garden Party and Mrs. Freeman is giving up her chairmanship of the Woman's Committee."

The next morning she was at the dining-room window. "Two of the McSwiggins have just told me they won't take any more music lessons," she said, entirely taking away Betsy's appetite for toast.

That same afternoon she brought the

paper with the weather prophecy for the week. "'Thursday, Friday and Saturday, rain with easterly winds, clearing on Sunday,'" she read with puckered brows. "You see, it's going to be just as I said. We haven't had over ten dollars since the Supper, and now it'll rain for Mrs. Bean's party. Our good luck's gone for sure."

Betsy did the best she could to stem the flood of evidence of failure and, thanks to Emma Clara and Philip, she kept herself true to her resolutions. Emma Clara was too busy with her dressmaking to spend much time on speculation as to mere possibilities. "Don't you get discouraged by Selma's talk," she told Betsy one day as they were taking home some small dresses that had just been finished. "We're doing the best we can, and no one can do better."

Philip was more emphatic. "Selma's in a blue funk and she doesn't see straight," he said with his most superior air. "Of course, we're going a bit slow now, but we'll brisk up at the end. It's always so with these things."

Betsy was greatly heartened by these

words. "Are you going to do anything, Phil?" she asked rather timidly. "I won't let on if you'll tell me."

His look of surprise was so genuine she could not doubt. "Who—me?" he asked with a rather startled look. "Why, no, of course not. I've about done all my stunts. There isn't anything more I could do."

Betsy acknowledged this with a sigh. "There isn't a thing to do but wait," she said soberly. "I suppose we've all done our best. The twenty-ninth won't be very long after the Garden Party. "I wish it were Saturday now. I'd like to have it over."

That was the way she looked at it now. The fun of being an aid, and of wearing one of the pretty flowery dresses that Mrs. Bean had made up out of crêpe paper, and of acting her part in the dainty affair was almost forgotten in the eager anxiety for the more practical side of it. Memories of the disappointing Supper would rise when she thought of the Garden Party, and she was constantly shifting her estimate of the amount they would make.

"I won't look for very much and then I'll be bound to be surprised," she told herself, and she did try very hard indeed to keep down her hopes, although it was rather hard to be too doubtful when the weather man proved entirely wrong, and Thursday and Friday were gloriously beautiful days.

"It won't rain a drop tomorrow," she told Selma triumphantly as they watched a perfect sunset from the top of Pebble Hill. "Perhaps all that gold in the cloud linings is a good omen, too. See, there's a regular river of gold behind the trees by the creek down in Dr. Stanton's meadow."

Selma's eyes brightened as she gazed. She was not, however, of a nature to give up a cherished conviction. "That's superstition, Betsy Hale," she said with some severity. "You sound like an old pow-wow doctor, instead of a Christian girl. It would serve you right if we didn't make a cent tomorrow."

Betsy laughed good-naturedly. She was always strong in her belief in coming happiness when she was on such an hilltop with such a sweep of country beneath her feet.

It gave her an uplifting sense of power and freedom that sometimes rather went to her head.

"Wait and see," she returned gaily, repeating the formula that had grown to be a by-word with them. "We'll see which of us is right at sunset time tomorrow."

Then they turned and went slowly down the long hill, as the twilight came on and the first star hung quivering in the high heavens just over the chimneys of the Wee Corner.

Betsy said good-night to her friend with something of that golden sunset glow lingering in her heart. Her hilltop uplift was still with her when she went in to the lamp-lit sitting room and found her mother busy with proof sheets for her book, and she was quite content to slip away, after a silent kiss, to her dormer room to sit and dream by the favorite window.

There were very few signs of pin marks on the sill now, for the room had received a coat of paint in the interval since the birthday breakfast, and there had been no need for such relief in the smoother days of their

comparative prosperity. Betsy looked apprehensively at the spot where she used to punch in the pins.

"Thank goodness, I haven't needed to do that for ages and ages," she said as she cuddled down in her old place where she could see the outline of the tall pines against the sky. "It's been sort of tempting when Selma was so terribly discouraging, but I haven't done it once since the fresh white paint went on."

The warm prophetic glow of the golden sunset was still at her heart, and she knelt, leaning out to breathe in deep, full breaths of the sweet night air. She forgot the pin-pricks of disappointed hope, and she saw only the sparkle of the peaceful stars above her in the darkening sky.

"Tomorrow will be a beautiful day," she repeated to herself. "I feel sure that it will be a happy one, too."

She sat for a while reveling in the happiness of confidence restored, and then she went to bed contentedly, saying an extra sentence or two of thanksgiving in her prayers and giving the little ten-cent flag on her wall a tender pat.

"Whatever comes, I'll try to be cheerful," she said, as she slipped into her white bed. "Anybody can be cheerful, even though they can't do much else. That's a ten-cent service that's just in my line."

But, oh, how different from the visions of the night are the realities of the clear morning light! And how hard it is to put into practice the resolutions that are spoken so easily!

Betsy woke next morning with a tiny stab of pain in the side of her throat. She did not say much about it during the morning, though she was perhaps a shade less cheerful than usual and more given to swift retort than was her custom. Selma found her strangely indifferent to the delightful task of helping Mrs. Bean prepare her pretty garden for the afternoon fête.

"What's the matter with you today?" she asked with real concern, as Betsy sat down dolefully in the midst of the stir and bustle and put her hand to her throat. "Aren't you feeling all right? You look sort of queer to me."

The sympathy in her tone was too much

for Betsy. Her eyes grew very misty and her voice caught as she answered dismally, "I—I don't know for sure, but I think I'm getting a sore throat. I've tried to believe that it doesn't hurt, like the Christian Scientists tell you to do, but it keeps on. I guess I'll have to go home and stay there. It may be something fearfully contagious, you know, and it would be wicked to stay around among people."

How she hoped that Selma would contradict her, and would insist that she stay for such poor enjoyment as she might have, with that pricking little pain in her neck! But Selma was, above all things, a practical girl. She knew that Betsy had spoken sensibly, and she agreed hastily, though with real regret. She was very sorry for Betsy and she walked all the way home with her.

"I'll ask Dr. Stanton to stop and see you after his office hours," she promised as she hurried off. "He'll let you come back with us, I guess. I'll look for you by three anyway."

Betsy sat in the long chair, wishing very much that her mother had not been called

into town today of all days. She could have told Betsy just what was right to do. Lucy was kind, but Betsy had no opinion of her judgment. "If Dr. Stanton doesn't come—" she thought, in a whirl of disappointment. "If Emma Clara weren't so busy—If Mother only were home—"

Dr. Stanton did come, however, and he spoke very decisively. She must stay away from garden parties and other gatherings. Her sore throat was only a slight one, but it might be quite as contagious as a more severe one. She might stop out of doors all she liked, so long as the pain in her throat did not grow worse. If the pain grew worse she was to send him word and he would attend to the rest.

After he had gone Betsy went slowly upstairs and took out a paper of perfectly new pins. Than she sat down and selected the old spot, where the new paint only imperfectly covered the wounds of the past. She stuck ten pins into the hard old sill, and with every jab of their points she gritted her teeth hard together. But she did not cry. That was one consolation.

Then, having performed this little ritual, she rose up bravely and looked about her with eyes bright with her unshed tears. The glint of red and blue and a flash of white mingled with the gray of the wall, swimming in the haze before her. It was the little, humble flag signaling to her through her tears.

For a moment she simply could not respond. She stood clasping her hands together in mute resistance to its appeal. She did not want to be humble-minded and sensible and serviceable here in the solitude of her lonely home. She wanted an audience to her lowly deeds.

Then with a sudden surrender of her own will, she flung out her hands toward the tiny banner.

"All right," she said, and her clear voice was sweet with eager compliance. "I'll do it. I'll do it—for *you!* I'll not fuss and fret over it. I'll go down into the garden and try to be good."

It was very hard indeed to do it. The others were over there beyond the screening treetops making merry in their pretty dresses

in Mrs. Bean's pretty garden. The whole village was intent on the festivity, while Betsy must sit herself down in the long chair with only a yellow dog for company and try to make believe she did not care.

It was very hard indeed to do it. It was only by dint of much argument and by being very severe with the sympathetic Mac that Betsy accomplished it at last.

And just as she had arrived at a state of real resignation to her fate, along came the other yellow dog, and changed the whole scene in a twinkling!

CHAPTER XII

Betsy Introduces Major Hastings

BETSY had barely lost herself in the fascinating occupation of "playing bird," when it happened.

She was lying back in the long chair, staring with all her might and main up into the high green branches above her until the sense of being up there among the airy perches had grown so real that she was almost in danger of falling off of a high twig where her imagination had balanced her. Consequently she did not see the man on the bicycle ride slowly by, with a yellow twin brother of the sleeping Mac trundling contentedly after him. Nor was she conscious of the fact that the front gate had been left ajar by the doctor's hurried exit.

She had just hopped from one high green bower to another in the next branch when bedlam broke loose under her very feet. Down she came to the earth in a jiffy, tucking

up her toes swiftly and shrinking away from the howling, growling, snapping, snarling whirl of yellow fur on the grass beside the long chair.

"Oh, Mac!" she cried. "Stop it! Stop it this minute! Do you hear me?"

Mac did not hear, or if he did, preferred to ignore her feeble command. The whirling and growling went on briskly until a tall, energetic man came suddenly on the scene and grabbed the collar of one yellow furry whirl, and pulled him clean out of the scuffle, while Betsy, taking heart, laid hold of Mac's collar, and the two contestants were separated by the width of the flagstone walk.

"I hope my chap here hasn't alarmed you," said the man in the nicest way. "He's really not a bad sort usually. It's the Irish blood of him that rises once in a way, and then he forgets himself."

Betsy looked at the dog under his hand. He was sitting up quietly, with his tongue lolling out and his head cocked amiably enough toward his late enemy who was eyeing him thoroughly. "He looks quite pleasant now," she agreed, untucking her

feet and sitting up. "He's very like Mac indeed. And Mac is generally perfectly sweet. You can't think how good he is most of the time."

Her earnestness was matched by the man's serious air. "I can believe you. My chap is like that, too. He doesn't trespass as a rule. It must have been that he recognized a possible brother in your dog, and came in to investigate."

Betsy felt she must apologize in her turn. "Mac shouldn't have flown at him, but of course he's a watch-dog for us, you know, and——"

"He wouldn't be worth his salt if he hadn't tried to put out the intruder," declared the man. "He was doing his plain duty. They'll be friends now, I think, if they have a chance. They're both gentlemen enough to realize that the need for flying at each other's throats is over. Suppose we try them at it?"

He released his dog guardedly, and Betsy loosed the hold on Mac's collar. It was surprising how well he had judged them. They advanced slowly, sniffing primly, and then as they came closer, grew more friendly

until they were quite at home with each other. Mac was ready to lead the newcomer off to show his secret haunts, the hiding places for bones and his own special rabbit-runs, when the man whistled a low whistle.

"We must say 'good afternoon,' old chap," he said, as the dog came to heel. "Perhaps you'll meet your friend later, if we have luck here." And then, turning again to Betsy, he asked, "There's a fairly good inn here, is there not? I think I've heard that much of this village."

Betsy was glad to tell him of the comforts of the old tavern, for she had taken a fancy to this kind, long man and it was pleasant to think that he was not going to vanish entirely. She warned him against the mistake of going to the newer inn, which, she earnestly told him, was "perfectly horrid," and after he had thanked her and was saying his farewells, she suddenly remembered her mission in life—making the most of trifles.

Here was a chance of service almost lost.

The long man was out of the gate and on the road with one hand on his bicycle when the memory of the Garden Party flashed

over her. She was beside him in an instant and her words tumbled over each other in her eagerness.

"Oh, won't you go to the Garden Party, if you're going to stop over night? You needn't spend much, of course, but even five cents will be better than nothing."

The man swung about and looked down at her as she stopped, out of breath. He was amused and yet he listened respectfully, quite as though she had been a grown-up instead of a breathless fourteen-year-old. "Please tell me about it," he said seriously. "I'm hardly in trim for social affairs, but if it is so very urgent as you seem to think——"

Betsy did tell him about it. More than that, she invited him to come into the garden again while she explained the whole affair; and they sat down to it very comfortably, with the two yellow Irish friends at their feet and the cool breeze blowing the scents of sweet white clover and yellow lilies all about them.

The man was very satisfactory. He told Betsy something of himself in the course

of the talk. He was in search of health, it seemed, and was in a fair way of finding it among the blue hills where his fancy had led him. He seemed to know a good deal about the village, but Betsy found that he was very well informed about most places, and she attached no significance to that fact. He might stop hereabouts, he said, while the fancy held him, and he was very willing to enter into Betsy's enthusiasms for at least the space while she spoke.

He was a very good listener. She told him about the hospital scheme. She elaborated on the part that Philip played in each move of the affair. She proudly announced Emma Clara's part in the matter, and Miss Willie's donation, winding up with Mrs. Bond's offer and the slump in the Hospital Fund during the past days.

"Very, very little has come in this last week," she told him regretfully. "Selma says our luck is gone, but I keep on hoping. If those circus people had any gratitude they'd have given something before they left, but the Giant was the only one," and then she told him about Mr. MacTavers and his offering on the shrine of Caithness.

She was enjoying it all immensely, when the clock among the tree-tops beyond the big field sent a sudden reminder on the scented breeze. Betsy came to the present necessities with a start.

"Oh, there's five striking," she said, rising hastily. "Won't you please go now? I'm so afraid you'll miss getting there if you aren't rather brisk. It's only from four to seven, you know. And you might take ever so long getting settled at the hotel."

The man stood up, laughing, and held out a lean, brown hand. "I'll go at once if you'll promise to give me a card of introduction to someone at the party," he said with a twinkle in his nice eyes. "I am sometimes quite shy and——"

Betsy did not wait for the rest of his speech. She took him quite seriously. Away she flew into the house, and came back breathless again in a minute, with a sheet of note-paper in her hand.

"That's the best I can do," she panted. "Of course, I couldn't use mother's cards, and I haven't any of my own. This is sort of floppy, but it will answer, won't it?"

He looked it over, and was kind enough not to smile, though Betsy when she saw it afterward in Emma Clara's desk, laughed over the scrawled lines. "Please make him feel at home. Betsy Hale."

"Am I to deliver this to anyone in particular?" he asked gravely as he folded the sheet and stowed it away.

Betsy laughed at his expression. "Of course," she told him cheerfully. "I forgot to put it on the outside. You can remember it, though, I think. Miss Emma Clara Simpson is the name. You can remember that, can't you?"

He said that he could, and Betsy watched him ride away up the long slope toward the village, followed by his yellow dog until he disappeared over the top of the ridge. Then she went back to the long chair.

But she simply could not go back to "playing bird," although she tried it two or three times. Her mind was too full of the stranger to settle up there among the green branches again.

"He had nice hands and feet," she thought, "and a pleasant voice. He's quite polite,

too. I suppose he must be pretty poor, if he has to ride a bicycle about country roads to make himself well. I wonder if I ought to have insisted on his going to the Garden Party? Perhaps he's too poor to afford it."

Her fears were set at rest when Philip ran over with a generous portion of ice cream for her. "There's a new fellow in golf stockings and brogans that's come to see Emma Clara," he told her. "He's spending plenty of money, I can tell you. I bet he's awfully sweet on her or else he's showing off. I'll tell you more about him when I come over later."

Betsy left him go without an explanation. She saved that up for future enjoyment. "I wonder what he can be?" she thought, as she lay back luxuriously with the cool pink mound growing swiftly less under her industrious spoon. "He said he'd stay if he had luck. And here he is spending lots of money. I wonder what he can be?"

She shook off the unformed fear that he might be a pickpocket or burglar. "He's too nice for anything horrid," she said decisively, and she finished the pink ice cream

in a comfortable state of anticipation of Philip's next visit. "For I know I'll hear something nice about the man," she thought.

The pricking pain in her throat was quite gone, and she was entirely happy in her imaginings. She planned a delightful future for the next few days, with the long brown man growing quite well and helping greatly with the Hospital Fund.

Suddenly Selma's placid face appeared above the hedge.

"I can't stay a minute," she said as she came toward Betsy. "I just ran over with this ice cream and cake for you. How's your throat?"

Betsy sat up with a giggle. She took the pink mound very gratefully. Although her hunger for ice cream was somewhat abated, she had not lost her relish for friendly deeds, and Selma's remembrance of her was very sweet to her.

"How are you getting on?" she asked.

Selma turned her most placid face upon her. "We're doing fine," she answered happily. "Emma Clara's gentleman friend bought all the candy right out. He's spent

a lot already. He looks pretty poor, too, with those rough clothes and wearing short pants to a garden party. I'll be over again and tell you how much we make."

She was gone before Betsy could tell her about her encounter with the man in short pants. She had hardly disappeared over the hill before Emma Clara slipped in by the back way. She carried something covered carefully.

"I thought you could eat some ice cream," she began, throwing off the paper napkin to disclose the third pink mound. She stopped in surprise at Betsy's ripples of laughter. Then she saw the plate in Betsy's lap and the other empty plate upon the ground beside her chair, and she, too, broke into a merry peal.

"Do sit down and eat it yourself," begged Betsy. "It won't take long, and I'm sure you haven't had anything to eat yet."

Emma Clara had to confess that she had had no time so far for refreshment, and that the pink ice cream in the cool garden would be very agreeable.

"I'll have to eat and run, though," she

said, dropping into the nearest chair. "I promised Mrs. Bean to be back right away. There's a perfect stack of sandwiches to be made—those we had hardly lasted half an hour—and Miss Wilson is terribly slow about making them."

Betsy was alive with eager interest. "You're getting along beautifully, aren't you?" she asked with relish. "Philip and Selma both said that the bicycle man was helping a lot."

"If you mean Major Hastings," corrected Emma Clara with a twinkle, "I can tell you he's been a perfect godsend to us. He's bought all the candy and he's treated I don't know how many of the boys and girls to ice cream and cake and grab-bags all around. Why didn't you tell me his name, though, when you sent that note to me? It was rather queer to have to ask him who he was."

"I didn't know his name," Betsy had to confess, and then she told Emma Clara all that she knew of Major Hastings. "You see," she ended, "he was so nice and friendly that I never thought of his name. I just seemed to know him pretty well without it."

Emma Clara had disposed of her saucerful in a shockingly short time. She rose now, dropping a kiss on Betsy's cheek as she passed. "I'll have to run," she said brightly, "but I'll be back when its over and tell you all about it."

Betsy lay back in the long chair with her eyes on the western sky. The sun had sunk behind the tall trees of the thicket across the winding road, and a few light cloud-wreaths trailed luminously across the wide, high heavens.

"It's not going to be much of a sunset," thought Betsy with a twinge of regret. "There won't be a lot of gold like yesterday."

She sat up again watching the shifting panorama of the sky with eager eyes. Yesterday's golden cloud linings had proved prophetic. What would tonight's omen be?

"It's just plain light," she thought. "Not a bit of color to it."

But as she watched, the light died down and the miracle began. First the highest tips of the trailing cloud-wreaths glowed pink with the vanished radiance. Then, as the twilight grew rapidly, a flood of color

leaped out of the low western horizon, rising and pulsing higher and higher till the whole sky was aflame. Pink and violet and crimson rioted wave after wave, only to melt and change, as she looked, into a sea of living gold.

The beauty of it took her breath for a moment. The next minute she found speech.

"I do hope Selma sees it," she said aloud. "I wonder if she'll say I'm superstitious now."

The glory faded so swiftly that it seemed a long time to Betsy before the click of the gate told her that part of her suspense was at an end. Lucy, who had been bound by a solemn promise to come back as soon as the gains were counted, came over the dim grass to her chair. Betsy knew that she bore good news.

"They've been sold out this half hour," she told her eager listener. "But the folks are havin' such a mortal good time, they can't get 'em to go. It was twenty minutes to seven when they was cleaned out, and everything done for, but I couldn't hear what they'd made till this very blessed minute. They cleared one hundred and

ten whole dollars at that minty little party, and they might have done more if they'd had the stuff to sell."

Betsy clasped her hands joyously. "Oh, it was a good omen, after all," she cried gaily. "Selma was wrong about our luck. And the sky was all gold tonight, too!"

Lucy started for her kitchen. "I don't know what you mean about skies and that," she said. "But I do know that one hundred and ten whole dollars is a mortal heap to make at a minty little party like that."

When she was alone again Betsy smiled up at the last faint gleam behind the tall pines. "It was all gold tonight," she repeated happily.

A moment later she added, "I wonder how he could spend so much, if he's really so poor that he has to ride a bicycle about the country to get himself well?"

CHAPTER XIII

The Stranger Within the Gates

BETSY was not the only one who wondered about the long, brown man who had dropped from the skies that sunny July afternoon.

All the village discussed Major Hastings industriously. Who was he? Why did he stop so long at Bogart's Tavern? Where did he get his money, if he were really obliged to convalesce on a bicycle, so to speak.

"He's got only one suit to his back," declared Delia Skinner, the chambermaid at Bogart's. "And he don't look like he ever worked with his hands."

Emma Clara, who had seen much of the brown, pleasant major, said absolutely nothing. Even from the very first she was persistently silent.

"Emma Clara's got a beau," whispered Selma a couple of days after the Garden Party. "I saw them walking this morning—

of all times—and he was talking a blue streak. They were so taken up that they never saw me."

"I suppose they were talking about the hospital," returned Betsy, quick to defend her absent friend. "That's what we're all thinking of these last few days before the twenty-ninth."

Selma looked very wise. She shook her head slowly. "Maybe it was," she said, "and maybe it wasn't. I think it wasn't. He didn't need to shake hands with her for hospital work, did he? Or give her a keepsake right out in broad daylight? I think he acted rather funny for hospital work."

Betsy would not discuss the matter, and, as it was the lesson hour for two of the small pupils, Selma could not pursue the subject.

Although Betsy would not discuss it with Selma, she thought long and deeply of it, and the first chance she had alone with Philip she put her question, knowing she could trust him.

"Do—do you think Major Hastings likes Emma Clara, Phil?" she asked, hesitating

over so delicate a subject. "Selma says he goes walking with her."

"You bet he likes her," returned Philip with startling frankness. He at least had no reservations. "He's always helping her take home those dresses, or he's sitting on Simpson's porch, or he's chinning with old Simpson in the garden. Why shouldn't he like her? She's nice enough, isn't she?"

Betsy was silent. She had seen little of her friend in the last few busy weeks, and though she had been entirely content to allow the hospital to absorb Emma Clara, she found that she rather begrudged her to Major Hastings—even though she herself had voted him a dear.

"He's a good sort, too," went on Philip, more earnestly. "I'd swear he was as straight as a string, although—you won't tell, will you?" Betsy's look assured him and he went on in a lower tone. "Although I can't find his name in any of the Army Lists. I've looked them over and over. There's a Major William Hastings Gordon, but that's the nearest I could come to him, unless he's General Henry Hastings, who's in the Philippines now."

This was very discouraging. Betsy tried her mother next.

This time she announced the fact. "Major Hastings likes Emma Clara a great deal," she said abruptly, as they were breakfasting in the summer house.

It was the twenty-eighth day of July, and the Hospital Fund had only gained four poor dollars since the addition of the hundred from Mrs. Bean's little Garden Party. Affairs were in a critical condition, and Betsy was feeling the strain. She had shunned the Simpson house and kept much to herself, and the subject of Major Hastings and Emma Clara had become a sore one to her.

It did not help matters that her mother should hesitate over her answer. She certainly did hesitate—of that Betsy was quite positive. When she spoke it was with a smile.

"We all like Emma Clara a good deal, I think. Major Hastings is only proving that his tastes are the same as ours," she said lightly. "Did she tell you that he had ordered half a dozen little dresses for his

nieces? She says they are to be perfectly extravagant as to real lace and handkerchief linen. She expects to make over fifty dollars on them."

"Fifty dollars!" gasped Betsy, forgetting her grievance in this joyful news. "How gorgeous! That'll make at least seventy-five that she has earned. She had twenty-five saved up before he came. We'll get up to fourteen hundred, with all the little dribs that will come in at the last minute. Oh, I do wish that somebody would make it up to fifteen hundred. We did so hope for fifteen hundred."

She got out her pad and pencil and went out to the summer house to figure the possibilities, but count it up as she would, the figures remained stubbornly the same. Emma Clara's seventy-five brought the total up to thirteen seventy-six, and the proceeds from the music scholars, when collected, would swell the sum to thirteen hundred and seventy-nine dollars and fifty-four cents.

"There isn't any more to come in, either," said Betsy with a sigh as she ended her figuring. "It's dreadfully disappointing.

Mrs. Bond's offer hasn't livened things up much after all. I guess they'd have all done as much without it."

All that day she hoped against hope that the desired fifteen hundred might be reached. She was in a fever of expectancy whenever she saw Selma or Philip headed in her direction, but, though she waited up until nearly ten o'clock in the hope that some messenger might bring the joyful tidings of a belated donation, nothing more was added to the fund. It remained thirteen hundred and seventy-nine dollars and fifty-four cents.

"The sunset omen didn't work this time," she told herself rather dismally as she went to bed. "I guess the gold all went down with the sun, and we won't get any of it."

The fateful twenty-ninth of July dawned fair and clear, with a flood of rose and gold that seemed to presage more fortunate hours.

Betsy wakened in a flurry of spirits, remembering what day it was. She dressed slowly, stopping now and again to count up the unchangeable sum that remained obstinately the same for all her counting. "If it only had been fifteen hundred," she

murmured as she brushed her hair. "Then we'd have had three thousand from Mrs. Bond. It seems to me that we ought to have got fifteen hundred."

How she wished that she had been able to help bring in some really large sum! Her own ten-cent size looked very contemptible to her indeed at this moment.

"I wish—" she began, and stopped in a flutter.

Philip was dashing down the winding road, and she knew he must come with news of importance. She hung out of her dormer window, hailing him excitedly as he reached the gate.

"How much is it?" she cried.

She knew it was news of the hospital, and she was not wrong.

"It's just posted on the store porch," he called up, coming close under the window. "Major Hastings has promised an X-ray outfit. Isn't it dandy?"

Betsy stared down at his uplifted face with amazement and disappointment in her eyes. "An X-ray outfit!" she echoed stupidly. "An X-ray outfit!" Then, before he could

answer, she broke out impatiently, "Oh, why didn't he give the money for it instead! He could have said what it was for. Then we'd have had twice as much from Mrs. Bond."

Philip was rather put out by this reception of his news. "You ought to be glad he's given so much, anyway," he retorted rather sharply. "It'll cost a couple of thousand, they say. He's a right to give it as he pleases, I suppose."

"It would have been such a lot, though, if he'd given the money," wailed Betsy in the first shock of her disappointment. "Think of what we'd had from Mrs. Bond!"

Philip turned on his heel. "If you're going to talk that way—" he said in displeasure, and off he stalked, striking for the highway with brisk steps.

Betsy did not even look after him. She sat staring out into the dark branches of the pines, frowning a bit and adding up the delicious amount that would have been theirs if Major Hastings had shown more forethought.

Her face changed, however, as a memory

drifted across her busy mind. "The sunset omen is working, anyway," she said more happily as she rose to go down-stairs. "Perhaps more things will happen."

More things did happen.

Before noon Betsy had two surprises, and very pleasant ones at that. Selma came hurrying over about eleven o'clock with a hasty summons. "We're all to meet in our front yard," she said breathlessly. "All of us who have been doing things for the hospital. Father got word just now that someone was coming at about half-past eleven to meet the Hospital Committees. Hurry, do, and tell your mother. I'll stop for Emma Clara on the way back."

Betsy flew to do her bidding, and found her mother quite as eager as she to hurry off to Worthington's with her. The mystery of the summons added zest to the gathering. "It's like a play, isn't it?" said Betsy as they hastened along. "It's dreadfully exciting."

Everyone else seemed to think so, too, for they found the others assembling with eager haste. The pretty front lawn before the white house was quite filled when they

reached it. All of those who had any hand in the affairs of the hospital were there, and expectancy was on tiptoe as the watches and clocks crept onward to the appointed moment.

"It's exactly fifteen minutes past," cried a voice from the waiting crowd and as it spoke, a sound of trumpets made them all turn and stare up the Town Road.

Down the hilly, curving road in the full tide of the mellow noon sunshine came a strange procession. A glint of red and a flare of gold shone between the drooping elms that lined the highway, and a broad, heaving gray back surged heavily forward.

"It's the circus! It's the circus!" cried a dozen excited voices.

"Hurrah! Hurrah for the elephant!" screamed the small boys who fringed the crowd. "Hey, there's Jimmy, good old Jimmy!" and away they pelted through the dust to meet and greet the oncoming cavalcade.

It was Jimmy Delaney on the small trick donkey, riding in state. It was the circus, or part of it at any rate. The manager's

great gaudy wagon was there, and the cowboys and cowgirls were there. The two elephants with their drivers in the many-buttoned uniforms were there, and the big brown bear was there, too.

Betsy, divining why all this was happening, turned a glowing face to Selma. "They were better than we thought, you see," she whispered. "They must have come back to help——"

"S-s-sh," hissed Selma, though she, too, glowed with sudden admiration. It was plain she was glad to have been mistaken. "Hark, the herald is going to speak."

The herald, in the same faded green and gold suit, with the same gilded megaphone, rode slowly up the road, following Jimmy Delaney's tiny donkey. He stopped when he was opposite the group on Squire Worthington's lawn, and with a flourish of his golden trumpet, he flung out his message.

"Greeting to all good people! The manager and members of the Top-Notch Circus bring greeting to the good town that ministered to them in their need. To the Hospital Fund, with best wishes!" and he held up

aloft a canvas bag that all might see. "To the Hospital Fund with best wishes," he shouted, as he bent to thrust the bag into the hands of the Squire who stood smiling and staring on the curb near him. Then in quite a different tone, one that came from his heart and not speaking now through this gilt trumpet, he added, as he rode on, "Good luck to you all! The blessing of the road upon you!"

Squire Worthington, reading the tag, held up his hand for attention. "Two hundred dollars from the Top-Notch Circus," he shouted. "Two hundred for the Hospital Fund!"

Then what a babel broke out! How the small boys shrieked and the men cheered and the women waved their handkerchiefs! Everybody was speaking at once, and everybody was wild with enthusiasm. Never was gratitude more opportune or gift more appreciated. The circus that had slipped away from their midst unnoticed came back in a clamor of applause.

"Isn't it perfectly lovely that we'll have the fifteen hundred and over," cried Betsy,

as the frenzy began to subside. "What dears they were to remember us after they had gone off so far. Lots of people would have forgotten all about it."

"I guess they're pretty good after all," said Selma placidly. "Two hundred is an awful lot of money to give away when you're pretty poor."

They stood with the others while the procession wound its way past. They waved to the Scotch Giant, who, against all rules, was showing himself openly on the top of one of the big red wagons. They clapped delightedly when the manager rode by, and they kept up the applause while the long file of cowboys and cowgirls made their way by. They cheered the first elephant man with a will, but when the second driver heaved slowly past on his big swaying brute, they fairly outdid themselves in plaudits.

"He looks mighty different to you now, doesn't he?" whispered Philip, who had edged his way close during the progress of the affair. "I tell you, he looks good to me with that buttony driver on his noble brow."

"Think of them giving us two hundred

dollars!" said Betsy. "We've got fifteen hundred and seventy-nine dollars and fifty-four cents!"

At that moment, just as the end of the procession passed, the head of it wound into sight again. Jimmy Delaney could not forbear a second round of applause. He rode close to the curb now and he beckoned to the trio as he approached.

"I'm goin' to be a elyphant driver, soon's the old man there's tired of his job," he told them proudly. "He says I kin manage Jumbo well as he does. I'm with them for keeps now."

He was off again before there was a chance for questions. The three stood looking after him with mingled emotions.

"Mrs. Delaney will be pretty lonely, with Mr. Delaney in Highville and Jimmy in the circus," said Betsy. "I don't see why she lets him go."

"Oh, she'll come into the hospital work," returned Selma easily. "But how Jimmy will ever learn to be an animal trainer without studying them in their lairs is a mystery to me. He can't be much good at it, that's all."

"Piffle! He'll do well enough," declared Philip restlessly. "He's a sharp little cuss and he'll get on. He'll see a lot of the world, too, going about as they do. I think he's lucky, myself."

Betsy looked at him in alarm. "But, Phil, you wouldn't want to go about with all those queer people and sleep anywhere and eat anyhow and have no education and——"

He interrupted with a laugh. "Of course I wouldn't. I want my own kind of people and my own sort of life. But I couldn't help hankering after the fun that's coming to Jimmy. Here, you two had better keep your eyes open. There's Emma Clara beckoning to you."

They had been too much occupied to think of Emma Clara until now. Selma had even forgotten to tell Betsy that the Simpson house was closed to her knock when she was summoning the hospital workers. They turned toward the spot to which Philip pointed, and Betsy's eyes opened to their very widest, at Selma's nudge and whisper. "It's Dr. Stanton's gray machine," she said briefly.

And so it was. Dr. Stanton's gray machine —the one which Emma Clara had been able to recognize from afar—was standing in the driveway by Worthington's house, and the Doctor and Emma Clara were seated in it, while an eager throng was gathering beside it, shaking hands with both of the occupants and laughing and joking a great deal.

"Well, you certainly did steal a march on us," declared Mrs. Giles in her loudest tones. "I thought it was the short pants fellow that was sweet on ye, and here you're a-saying that you're promised to the Doctor. My, my, it's a funny world, ain't it?"

Betsy looked at Selma and Selma looked at Betsy. "Engaged to Dr. Stanton!" gasped Selma incredulously. "I don't see how that can be. The Major was perfectly devoted to her. Perhaps it's a joke."

"A joke!" echoed Betsy indignantly. "Of course it isn't a joke. Can't you see how happy they look? Come on and congratulate them, like the rest are doing."

Her heart was singing within her now. The fifteen hundred mark had been passed.

Emma Clara, her dear friend and companion, was not to be carried off by a stranger. She hurried up to the side of the gray runabout and she held out her two hands to Emma Clara, who had been waiting for her.

"How perfectly sweet of you to get engaged right now," she cried with shining eyes. "I do hope you'll be married very soon."

Betsy had to give way then to other pressing friends, and she stepped down off the running board to join Selma, who was hovering in the distance, talking to Major Hastings. Betsy wondered if he felt saddened by the announcement, but as she came up to him, she could see nothing on his kind, pleasant face to show that he was a disappointed man.

"Isn't it all coming out beautifully?" she asked him exultantly. "Over fifteen hundred dollars, and Emma Clara engaged—" She broke off, rather confused, for she had meant to rejoice in the fact that he, the Major, was not the lucky man. "And Jimmy Delaney so clever and funny on his donkey," she hurried on. "It's the life he's fitted for, I believe, and he'll do well in it."

The tall Major said nothing. He smiled down on her flushed face with an understanding smile, but he did not help her with words. Selma, too, was silent. Suddenly Betsy remembered the Major's gift, and her confusion passed into real gratitude.

"How lovely of you to give the X-ray outfit," she said heartily. She quite forgave him now for not putting in the money instead. "It'll be a wonderful thing to have right here in the village. I suppose Miss Willie Welch can come back home to stay when it's ready to use. All of us are very grateful to you, Major Hastings."

He took the hand she offered in her gratitude, and he held it in a strong, warm clasp. "It's partly your doings, Miss Betsy Hale," he said with a smile. "If you hadn't insisted on nabbing me for that blessed Garden Party, I probably shouldn't have ever known of your hospital and its needs." He dropped her hands and his eyes strayed out toward the Highville Road, where it lost itself among the trees. "It will be fun to make Bessie Bond sit up and take notice, though," he added as though to himself.

"It's Partly Your Doings, Miss Betsy Hale"

The two girls discussed this speech very thoroughly when they were on the way to the Wee Corner again.

"He must have known Mrs. Bond before," Betsy said very positively. "He called her by her first name."

"Well, we'll have to just wait and see," declared Selma. "He must have meant something by it."

It was exactly at sunset time, that golden hour for the Hospital Fund, that they found out what Major Hastings meant by his strange speech.

Selma was to take supper with Betsy and her mother in the summer house and Philip was also to be there if he could finish his belated garden work in time. He had neglected his daily portion in the vivid interest of the day and was paying up for it, as most people have to pay for neglected duties.

The town clock was striking seven, and even Mrs. Hale had given him up and had just told Lucy to bring out the supper, when he shot down the slope from the village and burst in upon them with triumph on every feature.

"Five thousand dollars in one whack!" he cried. "What do you think of that? Major Hastings has given five thousand to the Fund just this very minute. Jiminy, but they're all stirred up over it!"

After the rejoicings had moderated somewhat he added some gossip to his astounding news. "He's as rich as Crœsus and he used to be sweet on Mrs. Bond when she was a girl. Old Tomlinson recognized him today—first time he'd seen him since he came—and he says he's Hastings Gordon, old Golden Gordon's son, and he took his first name so's to be quiet and comfortable while he's getting well."

Betsy laughed as she thought of the fears she had had lest she was overtaxing the stranger's purse in sending him to the Garden Party.

"Well, it's all come out beautifully." she said happily. "We've such a lot of money for Mrs. Bond's check. Think of it—sixty-six hundred and seventy-nine dollars and fifty-four cents. It's sweet of the Major, isn't it? I'm glad he's so rich. I suppose he really didn't want to marry Emma Clara at all."

"Pooh, he was only talking to her about the hospital," interposed Philip. "He's sweet on Mrs. Bond, same as he always was. At least, so old Tomlinson says. He says a Gordon never changes."

Mrs. Hale called them to order as Lucy set down the last dainty dish upon the pretty table in the summer house. "Supper is served, my dears," she said in her sweet, clear voice, "We'll talk about it all when we're seated. Come, Philip. Selma, your place is here," and she gently urged them to their places.

When they were seated and the plates were being served, Betsy looked up at the western sky. High above the somber pines there was a streak of rose-colored light which was growing and changing, as she looked, into a yellow radiance.

"See, Selma," she said, with her eyes shining softly. "It's going to be gold again tonight."

Selma looked and nodded placidly. "We'll need all we can get," she replied quietly. "Even a tiny hospital takes a lot to run it. I wonder how long it will be before it

will be all done and Miss Willie can come back."

"Emma Clara will be married then," cried Betsy, kindling into eagerness again. "Oh, I do hope it won't be so very, very long!"

"They're going to send off the sum we've got precisely at midnight tonight," said Philip. "Won't it be jolly, Mrs. Hale, to get that check tomorrow?"

Selma had been very thoughtful. "I wonder what would have happened if Betsy hadn't had that sore throat?" she said slowly.

Betsy laughed happily. "I wonder what I'd have done that afternoon without my ten-cent flag," she said gaily. "It was the flag that made me try to be good. It's only a ten-cent one, but it's done pretty well, so far."

CHAPTER XIV

A Happy Interlude

BETSY hurried over to see Emma Clara the next morning after breakfast. She wanted to talk over the great event of yesterday, and particularly Emma Clara's share of it.

"To think she should have been so clever about it," she thought as she passed the beechwood copse. "It was just the thing to do, of course, because she'd have been bothered to death with questions from all the old ladies in the village if they'd have suspected anything like that."

She saw Emma Clara's slim figure in the back garden and she had just put her hand on the gate when Selma hailed her from behind.

"Do wait for me," she called. "I've something more to tell. Oh, Emma Clara!" she added as she reached the gate and Betsy, "do come to the maple-tree seat, for you'll want to sit down to listen!"

Emma Clara laid down her trowel and came, laughing, to the low seat about the big old maple in the side yard. She pulled Betsy down beside her with a caressing hand.

"Well, what is it now, Selma?" she asked gaily. "It's good news, that's plain. So take your time, my dear."

Selma drew a long breath. She enjoyed her audience and lingered over the enjoyment. "You'd never guess, so I'll tell you right out," she replied. "I'll begin at the beginning. It was about eleven o'clock last night. I had gone to bed, but I wasn't asleep. I was thinking of the Fund and how much we'd got and about Emma Clara and about the Major, and, oh, about a lot of things."

"Yes, yes," urged Betsy eagerly. "Do get on, Selma, or I'll simply explode. Tell us what happened and then tell us how it happened."

But Selma was not to be moved. She went on placidly. "And as I was lying there wide awake I heard someone walking around the house. It was awfully late for anything but burglars, but I never once thought of burglars.

I jumped up and looked out of the window, and who do you think I saw?"

She paused so long that Betsy burst out impetuously, "Oh, *anyone!* Do go on, please."

"It was Major Hastings Gordon," Selma told them impressively. "He went right to father's office, where the light was burning—father was waiting for midnight so he could send the telephone message to Mrs. Bond, you know—and he went in. I sat on the window sill and I almost died of sleep before he came out. He was there nearly an hour, I guess, for he'd hardly gone, and I was just going back to bed when the other one came."

"The other one?" broke in Emma Clara and Betsy at once. "What other one?"

"You'd never guess him, either," Selma told them triumphantly. "It was old Mr. Tomlinson, and he came creeping along so slowly that I'd never have known him if I hadn't seen his long white beard as he went past the light at father's window. He went in and stayed only a tiny little minute, and when he came out he stepped along as though he were in a great hurry. I guess he was afraid at first that he might go back and ask father for the check."

"The check?" broke out her listeners eagerly. "What check?"

Selma smiled gently at their excited faces. "Old Mr. Tomlinson's check for a hundred dollars," she replied evenly. "He's promised a hundred every year he lives. Father says he's betting against time, whatever that means."

"But I thought he was rather poor," said Betsy. "He wears very old clothes and——"

"You don't know old John Tomlinson, my dear," laughed Emma Clara. "He's quite able to give a thousand if he liked. It's a miracle, though, for him to give anything. I wonder how it happened."

Selma turned to Betsy. "You were right about Philip having done more than all the rest of us," she said. "He's been going over to Tomlinson's every day and doing all sorts of little things for the old man, and he's been talking hospital like a blue streak, but Mr. Tomlinson told father that he never once asked him to chip in with the others, and that's what brought him around to giving the check. He said it made him feel too downright mean to hear about all that the other folks were doing.

"I don't believe Philip meant to rub it in at all," cried Betsy indignantly. "He isn't that sort. He doesn't hint about like that."

"Whatever Philip meant, we've got the money, and that's the main thing, I suppose," returned Selma pleasantly.

Betsy was silenced, though she did not forgive old Mr. Tomlinson for his report of Philip's motives. "Dear old Phil was doing him some kindnesses," she thought with a flash of resentment," and he took it for scheming. Phil's much too honest for that sort of doings." Then she caught what Emma Clara was saying and she forgot Philip's wrongs.

"Major Gordon told me he was going to give some money," she was saying, "as well as the X-ray outfit. He didn't say how much, though. I had an idea it was to be much more than five thousand."

"You see, he didn't want to make Mrs. Bond give too much," explained Selma earnestly. "Father says he seemed to think it a sort of joke at first to make her give more than we could collect for ourselves, but when he came to see how much the hospital really

needed, he decided to give his real big donation today instead of yesterday. He came over last night to talk it over with father and he left the check with him, but it's dated tomorrow and so it can't be counted in with the twenty-ninth's amount."

Betsy had listened as long as she could. "What—how much—" she began. "Do tell me what you're talking about, Selma. Did Major Hastings—Gordon—give any more?"

"Any more?" echoed Selma proudly. "I should say so. He's given fifty thousand dollars right out, for another building next year, and he'll give fifty thousand more to keep it running smoothly. He's a regular millionaire, you know."

Betsy gasped. Such sums were too large for intimate, everyday reckonings. Her own small contribution shriveled into nothingness beside this magnificence. "And I thought Major Has—Gordon too poor to go to the Garden Party!" she exclaimed. Then she flashed about at Emma Clara. "Did you know he was a millionaire all along?" she demanded.

Emma Clara laughed into her excited face.

"I knew he was an old friend of Mrs. Bond's and that he was far from poor. I knew he was here under a sort of disguise; he told me that the morning after he decided to stay in the village for a while. He showed me the picture of his father and mother in their Newport house. I took a good look at it and I recognized his father from the pictures in the papers. We shook hands on it then, and he gave me the address of his sister who had the little girls I was to make those lovely dresses for."

Betsy turned to Selma with a laugh. "So that was the handshaking and the keepsake that he gave her! You weren't so clever about it, after all." To Emma Clara she explained: "She thought the Major was making love to you, and we were dreadfully excited over it."

"So were most of the rest of them," laughed Emma Clara. "But your mother was in the secret—I had to have that much relief—and so was the Doctor after the second or third day."

Betsy laughed a low ripple, remembering her mother's hesitating manner when she had

put her question. "We've had a lot of excitement for nothing," she said. "It's all come out beautifully, though. And, oh, Emma Clara, you'll be married sooner than you thought, won't you?"

Emma Clara blushed and laughed happily. "We'll have to see about that," she replied softly. "It takes some time to get ready, you know."

To their eager questioning, however, she did confess that she had the wedding all planned. She would be married in the little church with Mr. Gaston officiating and with Selma and Betsy for maids. "I won't have another soul," she said decisively. "The Doctor will have Dr. Harper from Cheston for his best man, and there will be some ushers, I suppose; but I'll have just you two girls, and you'll be in the very palest pink with little white veils and posy bouquets."

Betsy's raptures were not to be held in a moment longer. "Oh, Emma Clara, can't you hurry up and have it soon?" she cried ardently. "I simply can't wait too long. It sounds so deliciously beautiful!"

Emma Clara laughed and pinched her

cheek. "Wait and see," she quoted, " 'Time will tell'."

The wedding did not come off quite so soon as Betsy would have wished, but it was arranged much earlier than there had been any thought of having it. Mrs. Bond's generous check for fourteen thousand came as she had promised and the money so unexpectedly showered on the little hospital made things move at a lively rate. Mr. Simpson, who had the contract from Mr. Gaston for alterations of Miss Willie's roomy old mansion on the back road, pushed the building at a rapid rate—being perhaps pushed in his turn by the Doctor and Emma Clara. "It'll be ready a month sooner than we calc'lated on," he told the committee when they were discussing matters at the first meeting after Mrs. Bond's check had arrived.

Major Gordon, too, had a hand in the pie. He stayed on in the village long after his two weeks were up and he was constantly ordering supplies before they were needed, or thinking up some new donation that might facilitate the work. By the end of August, the date for the opening of the hospital was set, and Emma Clara's wedding day was announced.

In the swift-flying days till the fifteenth, the date set for the marriage, Betsy found the hours all too short for what she wanted to put in them. The music pupils had dropped off, but she had other duties that kept her occupied. She was learning to sew very neatly and she was making a pretty crêpe negligee for Emma Clara's trousseau, and that took a great deal of time and thought.

Philip, too, gave her something to think of.

They were skimming stones in the brook one afternoon on their way home from a visit of inspection to the hospital buildings.

Philip sat staring down into the brown, mossy depths before him. "See here," he broke out unexpectedly, "you've got to promise me you won't tell. It's a real secret, but I don't like to keep it from you. Will you promise?"

Betsy nodded eagerly, holding out her hand to bind the promise.

"I'm going to be a surgeon," he told her earnestly. "I've been thinking about it ever since this hospital business started and I went over with Doc Stanton the other day to that accident in Holbrook. And when I

saw him get out his instruments and begin to work so calm and orderly and quick, something inside of me warmed right up to it, and I knew what I was cut out for."

"Oh, Phil, how perfectly lovely!" cried Betsy in a glow. "Then you'll be here all your life and we shan't have to do without you. I'm so glad."

He grinned at her sheepishly, with his reticence coming back strongly upon him. "Maybe they won't let me chop them up here," he flung back, skimming a stone with careful aim. "But I'll do it somewhere, I can tell you that. Hi, there's a double-decker! See if you can match that."

Betsy knew she must say no more about the matter, but she was very proud of Philip's inclination toward surgery. "It takes very clever men to do it well," she thought as she went home, with Mac and the Major's chap racing across the fields before her. "Dear old Phil is clever enough for anything, though. How sweet it was of him to tell me about it."

She laughed a little as she reached the flag-path gate.

"He doesn't dream of the surprise there is

for him" she said happily. "And I did it all without asking. I just talked about his part in the hospital doings, and the Major and Doctor Stanton did the rest. I hope I can keep it in until the Opening Day."

CHAPTER XV

Big Flags and Little Flags

"THERE, I did keep it to myself," Betsy said triumphantly on the morning of the great day. "Phil will see I can keep other secrets than his."

It was the first day of September and not a cloud was in the sky.

In the two weeks that had passed since Emma Clara's wedding Betsy had been in a fever of excitement lest any of the plans might miscarry or any of the actors in the opening exercises might be hindered from appearing. The morning had dawned clear and bright, however, with every prospect of a perfect realization of all her hopes.

In the first place, Emma Clara and the Doctor had come home on the late train yesterday, and so Betsy was sure of them. She had rushed over to the Doctor's house as soon as breakfast was over, and clasped in Emma Clara's warm arms, she had talked

over the delights of the wedding and told her friend all that had happened since that event.

"It's only such a very little while, too," wondered Betsy, remembering with all her might. "Everything's changed now, although it's pretty much the same, too. The dear Wee Corner is the same and you and Philip and the rest are the same, only nicer. Mother is as sweet as ever, and the village is just as pretty as it ever was. The nice part is all there, but it's got so much nicer. It's sort of spread out, you know, until everything is better and happier."

Emma Clara nodded. She understood. "It's love and kindness and helping one another that has done it," she said slowly. "I suppose that is the secret of most of the happiness in the world,—wanting to do things for others—trying to be of service."

A memory of the thrill that had stirred within her at the sight of the big flag at the cross-roads flashed into Betsy's mind. She recalled the great ambitions of those first days and she sighed a little fluttering sigh.

"Some people are able to do such big things," she said wistfully. "It's pretty

hard to be just a ten-cent size," and then she started as she saw Selma in the doorway.

"Your mother says you are to come home and dress at once," she told Betsy impressively. "You've got to look very well today, you know."

Betsy thought that Selma's sudden pause was due to some signal from Emma Clara, but she was too happy to stop to investigate. "I'll be there in a jiffy," she said, springing up readily, and with a final kiss and promise to be on time, she joined Selma, who was already in the road.

"It's all going splendidly," Selma told her as they hurried along. "Miss Willie has come home and is to take her first treatment tomorrow. She says that X-ray outfit is a godsend to her, and she knows that she'll get well for keeps now that she can stay here where she belongs. She sent the queerest message to you, though."

"What is it?" asked Betsy, kindling. She thought of the faery nook and of the other side of Miss Willie's house, and she knew she should have an unusual message from her eccentric friend.

"She says that the Nickleman is waiting for you at the old place," Selma repeated with a pucker of curiosity on her smooth brow. "What does she mean by that? It sounds like gibberish to me."

Betsy was saved the trouble of evasion by Philip's hail from the hedge nearby. He was getting some wild flowers for Mr. Gaston's study table—a daily offering on his part and one that he had fought several of the town boys for criticising.

"The Bonds have come," he called as they halted. "Helen's ever so fat. You ought to see her. They're stopping at Bogart's and Major Gordon is as thick as mush with them."

"Is that all?" asked Selma with quiet indifference. "Thought you had something great to tell us."

Nevertheless when they were hurrying on again, she was the one who was most interested. "Perhaps Mrs. Bond will fall in love with him at last," she said with relish. "Wouldn't it be great if he married her and lived at the Shrubberies?"

Betsy scouted the idea. "Mrs. Bond is

too old to fall in love. She's almost forty, and people of forty don't fall in love, I should hope."

They parted at the corner and Betsy ran on to the Wee Corner to find her mother waiting and her clothes ready for her. She stopped in astonishment as she saw what lay on her bed.

"But I wasn't to wear my bridesmaid's dress," she cried. "I thought——"

Mrs. Hale silenced her gently. "Hop into it as soon as you've bathed and combed," she said in the tone that Betsy never questioned. "We've no time to argue."

Betsy wondered at the haste with which she was arrayed. The anxious care her mother displayed that her hair should be smooth and her ribbon should be carefully tied, that her slippers should be immaculate and her dress complete, caused her a flitting moment of wonder, for she knew that she was to be among the audience on the benches, while Mrs. Hale and the other promoters of the hospital were to be on the raised platform where the exercises and speeches were to be delivered.

As she was taking a final survey of herself in the mirror to make sure her hair was quite right, the toot of a horn sounded from below, and her mother beckoned her.

"Helen Bond has come for us, my dear," she told her as they hurried downstairs. "She is wild to see you, and will take us over to the hospital with her.

"Where's Mrs. Bond?" asked Betsy, as the front door was reached. "Isn't she coming, too?"

Mrs. Hale smiled a queer little smile. "She will go with other people," she replied hastily. "Be quick now, my dear. We'll be late if we don't hurry."

Betsy stepped out on the door-stone, and the magic began.

There by the machine, with her face wreathed in eager smiles of welcome, sat Helen Bond, not fat as Philip had pictured her, but rosy and happy looking as any girl need be. She sprang to greet Betsy with a hearty kiss and then she turned to Mrs. Hale, who was stepping into the car.

Betsy sat back among the soft cushions while her mother and Helen chattered on

together in the friendliest way possible. She heard Philip's name more than once and her heart beat quickly as she heard it.

"Dear old Phil will have a surprise when he gets there," she thought with a joyful bounce that she restrained instantly as endangering her fluffity frock. "He doesn't dream that the orator from the city is going to speak of him when he tells the story of how the hospital was started. Oh, how lovely it was that I could get Major Gordon to listen to so much talk about Phil's part in it. He did it, I'm sure, for no one else would have dared insist that a real public orator should speak about a mere boy. I hope he'll like it, that's all."

They were at the hospital gates before she could decide whether Philip would enjoy his moment of triumph to its full, or whether it would take time to reconcile him to the glory of public praise.

"He's bound to like it, sooner or later," she said as she followed Mrs. Hale and Helen from the machine. "It's perfectly lovely to be praised—when you've been good."

Helen turned to the ranks of well-filled benches. "I'll slip in here where I can see

you both," she said, and was making for the second row when Betsy stopped her.

"We'll have to have two together," said Betsy, trying to slide her hand from her mother's gentle grasp. "Mother will be on the platform and——"

"And that's where you're to be," ended Helen, laughing at her puzzled face. "You're on the platform, right next to Philip. I heard them arranging it this morning before I came for you."

She slipped away then, and Betsy, dazed and flushing, followed her mother to the steps of the wooden platform.

At the first step she hesitated. "Are you sure?" she asked, and at her mother's nod and smile, she stumbled on blindly after her, knowing that there could be no evasion of the high fate that waited there above.

She tripped on the second step, caught herself quickly, heard a ripple of amusement run about the benches behind her, and blushed a hot crimson at her own awkwardness.

The next moment her eye caught a familiar ripple of color. All about the big stand ran a

drapery of red, white and blue, and as Betsy's excited glance rested mechanically on the beloved colors, her embarrassment passed and she was herself again. The flag had called her once again and she was quick to respond to that call, even though it might be in her poor little ten-cent way.

She walked quietly up the rest of the steps behind her mother, and followed her to the empty chairs on the other side of the platform. She did not think of herself at all now. The hospital and its needs, the services that others had offered so freely were in her mind as she sat down in her place and looked out over the sea of faces below her.

One by one, she recognized them. Mrs. Delaney was there in her best bib and tucker, smiling and waving at Betsy with all her warm Irish heart. Old Mr. Tomlinson was on the front bench with his ear trumpet in evidence, intent on getting as much as possible for his money, and, most delightful of all, Mr. Si Myers with his pale cheerful face all wreathed in smiles was there, too. How Betsy's heart glowed as she looked down at him.

"He ought to be up here right in the very front," she thought. "He was one of the very first starters of it, though he doesn't know it."

Then she fell to wondering why Philip did not come. She knew he was to have a seat on the platform, and the empty chair next her own had his name scribbled on the back. "He surely can't have gotten wind of what was going to happen and have run away," she thought uneasily.

But in another minute she was reassured. Philip came up the steps with Squire and Mrs. Worthington and Selma, and he came toward his chair with the calmest manner in the world, nodding to her as he sat down, and then turning his whole attention to the crowd on the benches and beyond. Apparently he had no idea that he was to be one of the features of the day.

Betsy watched him carefully when the exercises began. During the opening prayer she peeped at him once or twice, but he seemed entirely absorbed and unconscious. When the orator was introduced and had bowed his gracious response to the applause

that greeted him, she fairly held her breath for the words that she so longed to hear.

What she heard was a great surprise to her.

"We say that we do not disregard the day of small things," he said in his deep, rolling voice. "We speak of the power of little things. Where shall we find it more clearly shown than here in our midst today? This hospital with its operating room and its X-ray department, with its comfortable ward and its four handsome private rooms, owes its substantial being to the inspiration of one young girl, to the persistence of another, almost a child in years, and to the energy and capacity of a fourteen-year-old boy.

"When Betsy Hale"—here Betsy gave a great start and blush—"gazing on the mighty emblem of our nation's hopes, was first stirred by a desire for service to that nation"—here Betsy flung a reproachful glance at Philip, whose guilty face showed her suspicions correct—"when, almost in the lisping accents of infancy this young creature"—here Betsy sat up very straight, trying to appear as old as possible—"this young creature urged upon her elders the task that was

too great for such frail hands, the hospital had its beginning."

He had to wait at least a minute for the applause to die down, and Betsy took the occasion to whisper sharply to Philip, "You told, you mean thing!"

Philip grinned back, "Well, you've got me in it, too."

And then the great man went on. "When, at the instigation of the younger element the interest was perhaps too lax, who but another youthful spirit, a boy of resource and enterprise, fanned the flame to burning by the children's parade. Philip Meade well merits the honor which is to be his today, the honor of raising the banner which is to float above the house of healing; and to Philip Meade I accord all the honor which is due."

Another pause for applause and then the climax: "To Betsy Hale and to Selma Worthington and to Philip Meade belongs the honor of pointing the way which the generous-hearted, public-minded citizens of this beautiful town were so quick to follow. 'A little child shall lead them.' My brothers, it has been proved to us beyond a doubt that Scripture does not err."

Betsy could not bear very much more, and she was glad that the gifted orator took up the praises of the real projectors of the hospital scheme. She looked at Philip sideways, but he was staring into his hat with a face too red for comfort. She glanced at Selma then and saw that that young lady was better framed for public praise than either Philip or herself, for Selma was calm and placid. She leaned over a little to whisper to Betsy as the speech went on.

"He needn't to have lugged me into it at all," she said with gentle gratitude to the speaker. "I didn't do anything except keep up with you two. I guess he did it because Father is squire and all that."

Betsy, remembering, was quick to whisper back, "You were the very first, for you told me about it in the beginning when we were coming home from the circus parade that day."

Selma sank back in her seat, shaking her head gently, with her pink lips pressed firmly together. Although she could not put her denial into words, she was far from being convinced.

It seemed an eternity to Betsy sitting there in the full glare of public scrutiny before the orator had ended and the Major had his turn. His speech was short and plain and practical and he did not keep his audience long. He sat down amid a storm of applause, and Betsy could hear old Mr. Tomlinson's shrill voice from the front row, "Thet short pants fellow's got more sense then 'em all."

After the Doctor's short address of welcome and the formal presentation of the house in the name of Miss Willie Welch, who was on the platform back of Mrs. Bond; and of the alterations and repairs in the name of Mr. Gaston, who had been the first on the program; and the announcement of the liberal donations from all the sources, the orator rose again.

"The flag to be raised today is presented by Miss Helen Bond," he announced in his sonorous tones. "Mr. Philip Meade, who is to have the honor of raising the heroic emblem in recognition of his services to the town of his adoption, will please step forward."

Betsy's heart almost stopped beating. Suppose Philip would balk and ruin the carefully

planned reward of service! Suppose he should be too shy to answer the call!

She need not have trembled for Philip, however, as she saw in another moment.

He rose and went forward quickly and quietly with his head erect and his face composed. He bowed to the great man as he reached the big white flag-pole where the beautiful silken banner was being adjusted to the ropes, and at the signal he took the cords into his hands.

As the assembly rose Betsy had a glimpse of his face as he watched the brilliant flag soaring upward on its tight-held ropes. It was shining with a great adoration as his eyes followed the floating stars and stripes. She knew what a thrill possessed him, and a shiver went down her own back as she too looked upward.

The starry field showed bright against the clear sky and the red and white stripes fluttered joyously out in the free air. All of the great silky banner seemed vibrant with life, and strength, and hope.

Betsy looked up at it floating there in the sunshine and once more the tears stood in

her eager eyes, and once again she felt the call.

"It isn't the size that makes the difference," she murmured. "It's the same flag, whether it's large or small."

After the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner" and the closing prayer, she went down the wooden steps again with the others. Selma was beside her and Philip was back of her, but it was to Philip that she turned.

"It was the flag that did it all, wasn't it, Phil?" she said with conviction. "It just makes you want to do things for it."

And with that last adjustment of the credit of the affair, she looked back over her shoulder with a long, lingering, loving look.

The flag was floating out in the sunshine, rising and falling on the summer wind, beckoning and promising as of old.

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